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SCOTLAND'S WITCH TRIAL FRENZY

Why did James VI persecute so many of his people?

HISTORY MAGAZINE

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May 2025

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THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF VE DAY

How ordinary Britons celebrated the defeat of Nazi Germany

Who fired first?

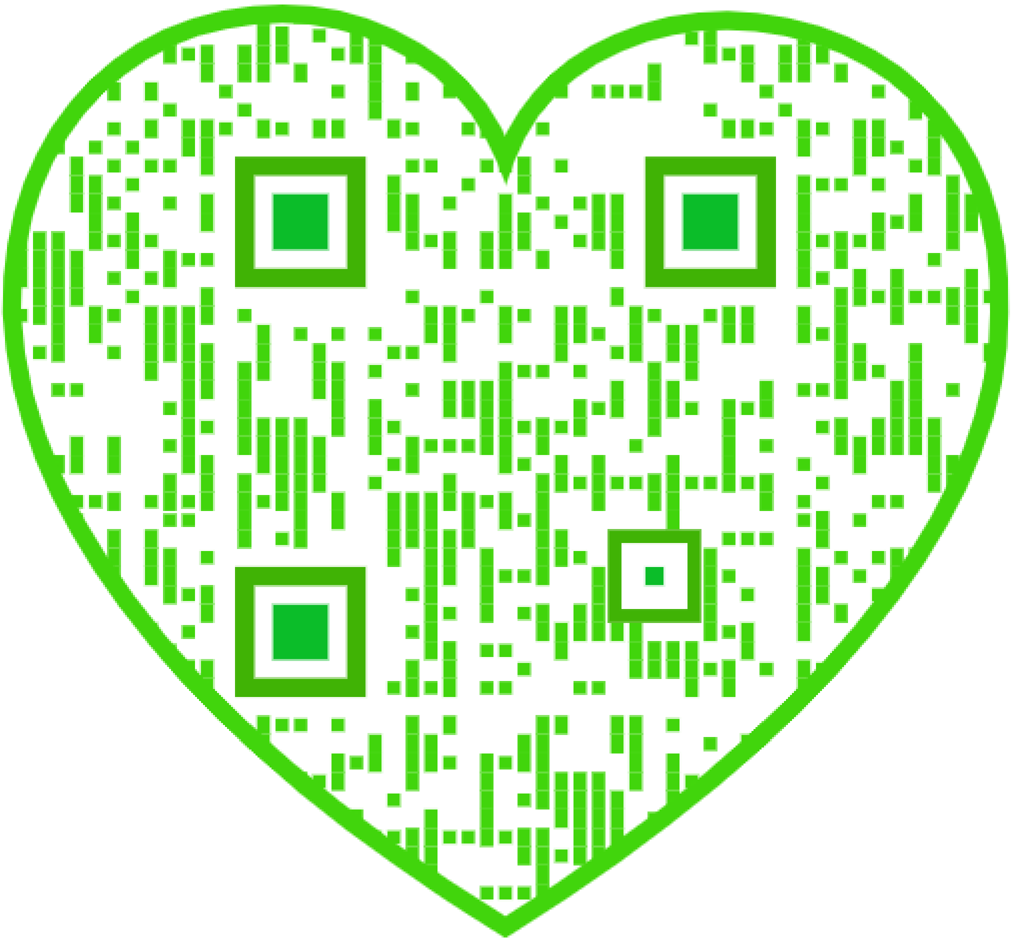
The propaganda battle at the heart of the **American Revolutionary War**

Mummy needs wine

How ancient Egypt was fortified by the fruit of the vine

Medieval Europe's greatest love story?

Sex, rage and tragedy in 12th-century Paris



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WELCOME MAY 2025

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“My dear friends, this is your hour.” These were the words of Winston Churchill, broadcast to the nation from Downing Street on the afternoon of **VE Day**. After six long years, the war in Europe was over and a wave of celebration engulfed Britain. For some the joy was tempered with thoughts of those who had been lost or were still fighting or imprisoned in the far east. But for anyone who was there, it was a day that would live long in the memory.

Sixty years later the BBC tapped into those memories through its vast oral history project, the WW2 People’s War, which compiled the wartime testimonies of 47,000 people. And for our cover feature this month, John Willis has drawn on this archive to explore how **Britons experienced that fateful day**. You’ll find it on page 22.

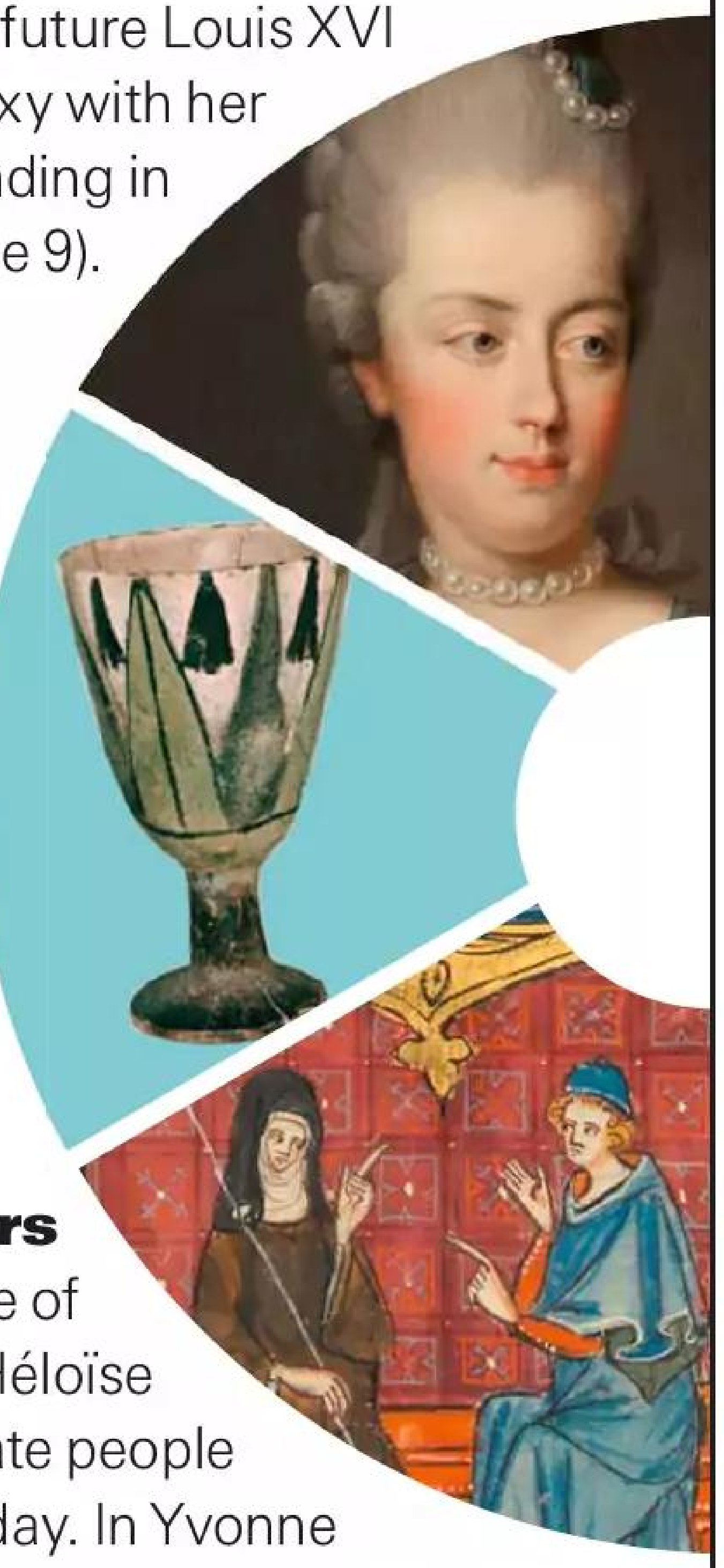
Also this month we’re looking back at one of the darkest episodes of the early modern era. The **European witch hunts** saw thousands persecuted across the continent, and the situation was particularly grim in Scotland where the rate of execution was far higher than in many other countries, notably England. On page 30, Martha McGill shows how a combination of factors fuelled this maelstrom of violence.

If either of these pieces – or anything else in the magazine – inspires you to dig deeper, then don’t forget to check out the wealth of **articles, podcasts and videos that are available on our HistoryExtra website**. If you’re a magazine subscriber you can access it all for free, and if you’re not, then why not take advantage of our latest offer on page 54.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

Rob Attar
Editor

THREE THINGS I’VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

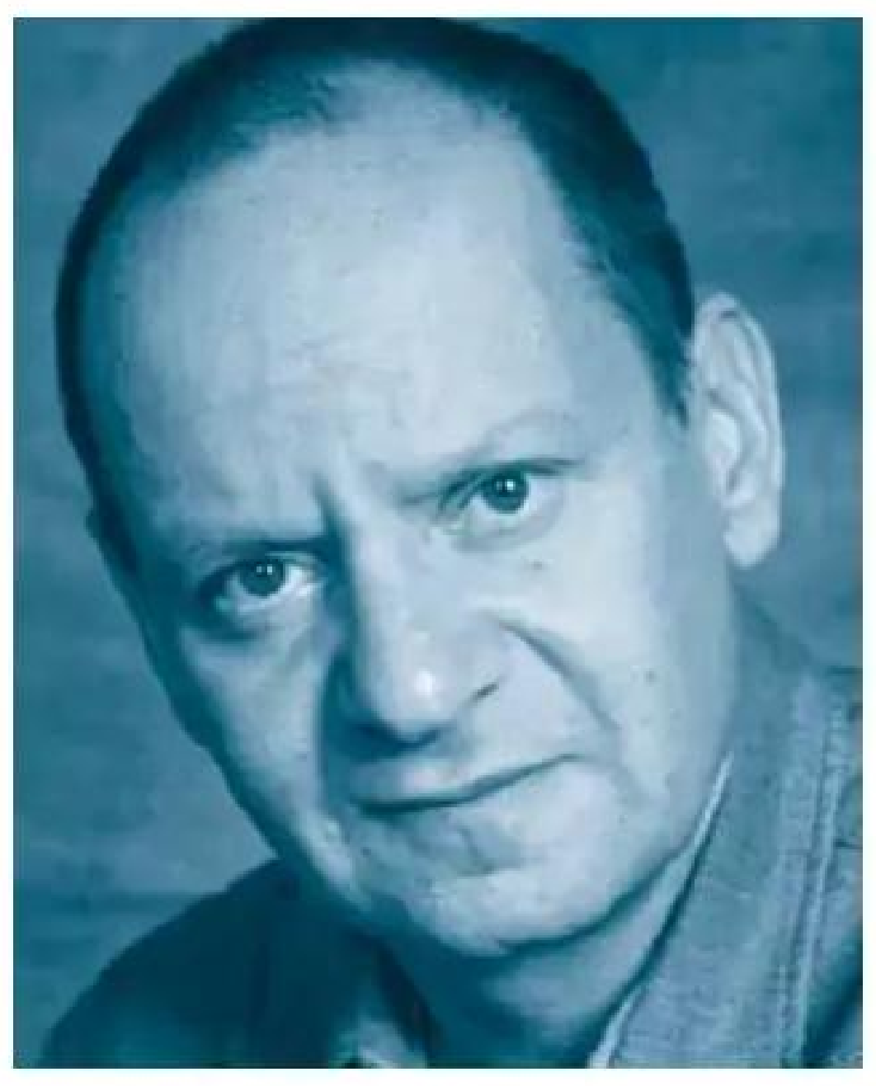


1. You look familiar
I was intrigued to read in this month’s *Anniversaries* that Marie Antoinette’s marriage to the future Louis XVI took place by proxy with her own brother standing in for the groom (page 9).

2. Wine for a dime
In Islam Issa’s article on ancient Egypt’s love of wine, I was interested to learn that the vending machine was invented in the first or second century AD by Heron of Alexandria (page 67).

3. Timeless lovers
The medieval romance of Abélard and Héloïse continues to fascinate people into the modern day. In Yvonne Seale’s article on the couple she reveals how it was referenced in both *The Sopranos* and *Being John Malkovich* (page 44).

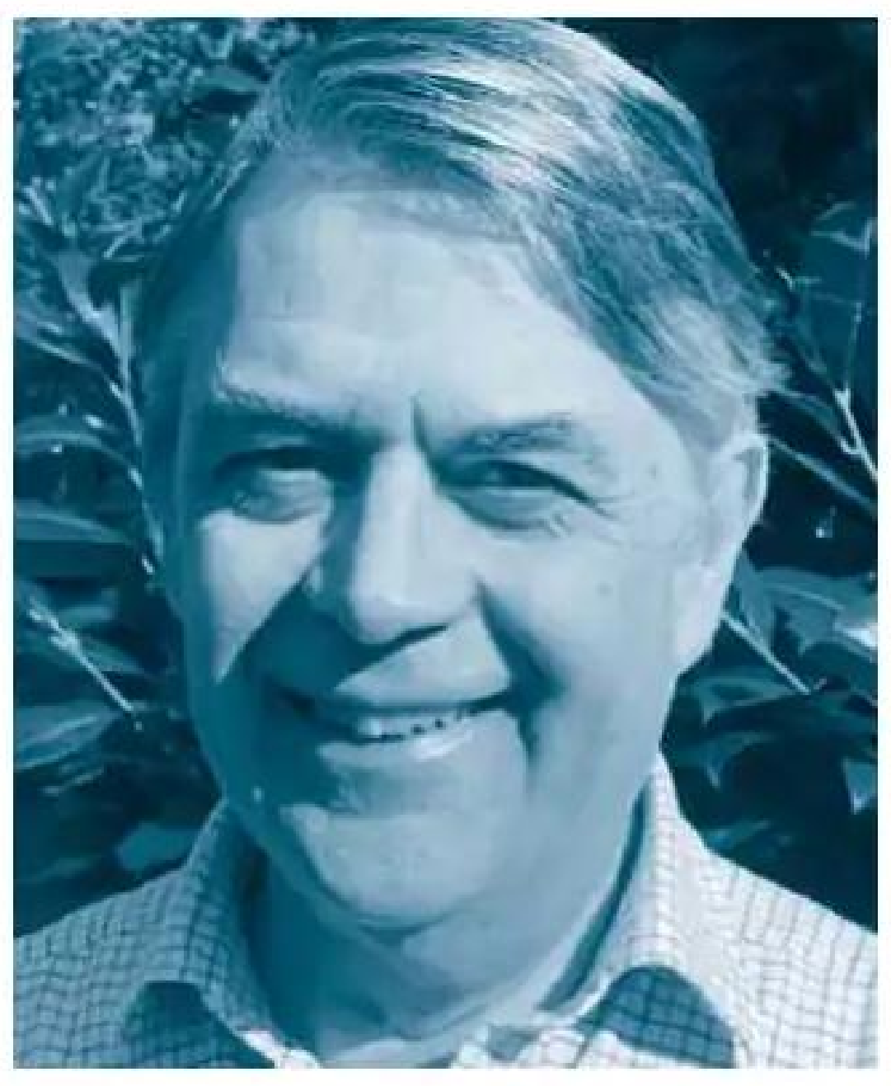
THIS ISSUE’S CONTRIBUTORS



Philippe Sands
“It was like nothing I’ve ever experienced before, and nothing I have experienced since. Everyone who was in the room understood that this was something of huge significance.”
Philippe discusses his involvement in the trial of Augusto Pinochet in 1998 on page 70

Islam Issa
“One of the reasons ancient Egyptians remain so supremely fascinating is that ordinary, everyday life – actions as simple as pouring or drinking some wine – seems always to go hand in hand with a marvellous mythology.”
Islam explores ancient Egypt’s love affair with wine on page 63

Martha McGill
“The Scottish witch-hunts were far bloodier than their English counterparts. Exploring why teaches us about law, religion and the lives of those women and men persecuted for an imaginary crime.”
Martha tells the story of Scotland’s witch trial frenzy on page 30



George Goodwin
“The American Revolutionary War was the first conflict where newspapers were decisively used to exaggerate victory, ameliorate defeat and claim all-important moral supremacy.”
George considers the propaganda war that followed the battles of Lexington and Concord on page 46

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ON THE COVER: A WOMAN CELEBRATES OUTSIDE BUCKINGHAM PALACE, LONDON, ON VE DAY, 8 MAY 1945: PA PHOTOS–TOPFOTO. WITCH: WELLCOME IMAGES. THIS PAGE: EYEVINE/TOPFOTO/GETTY IMAGES/BNF

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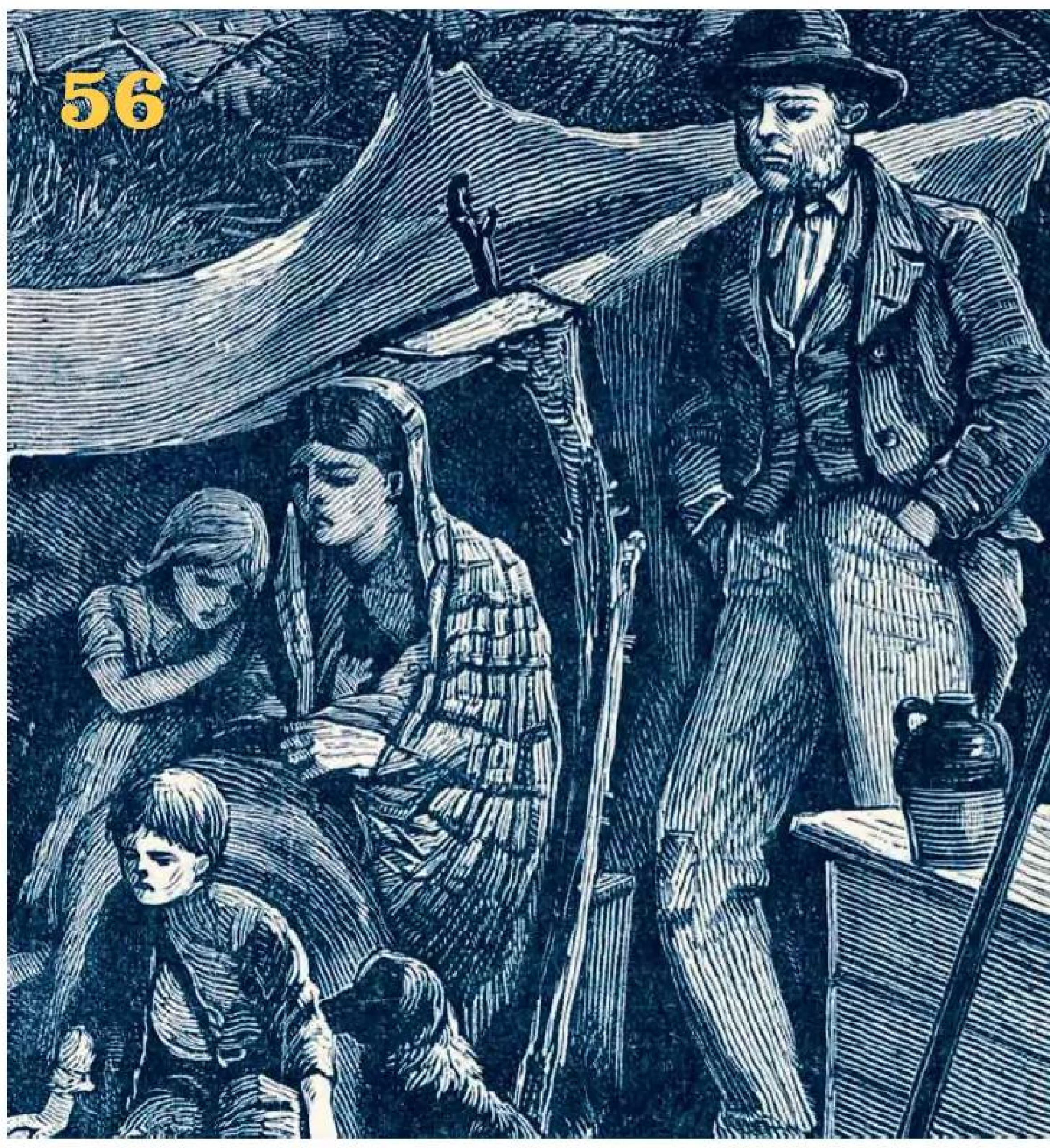

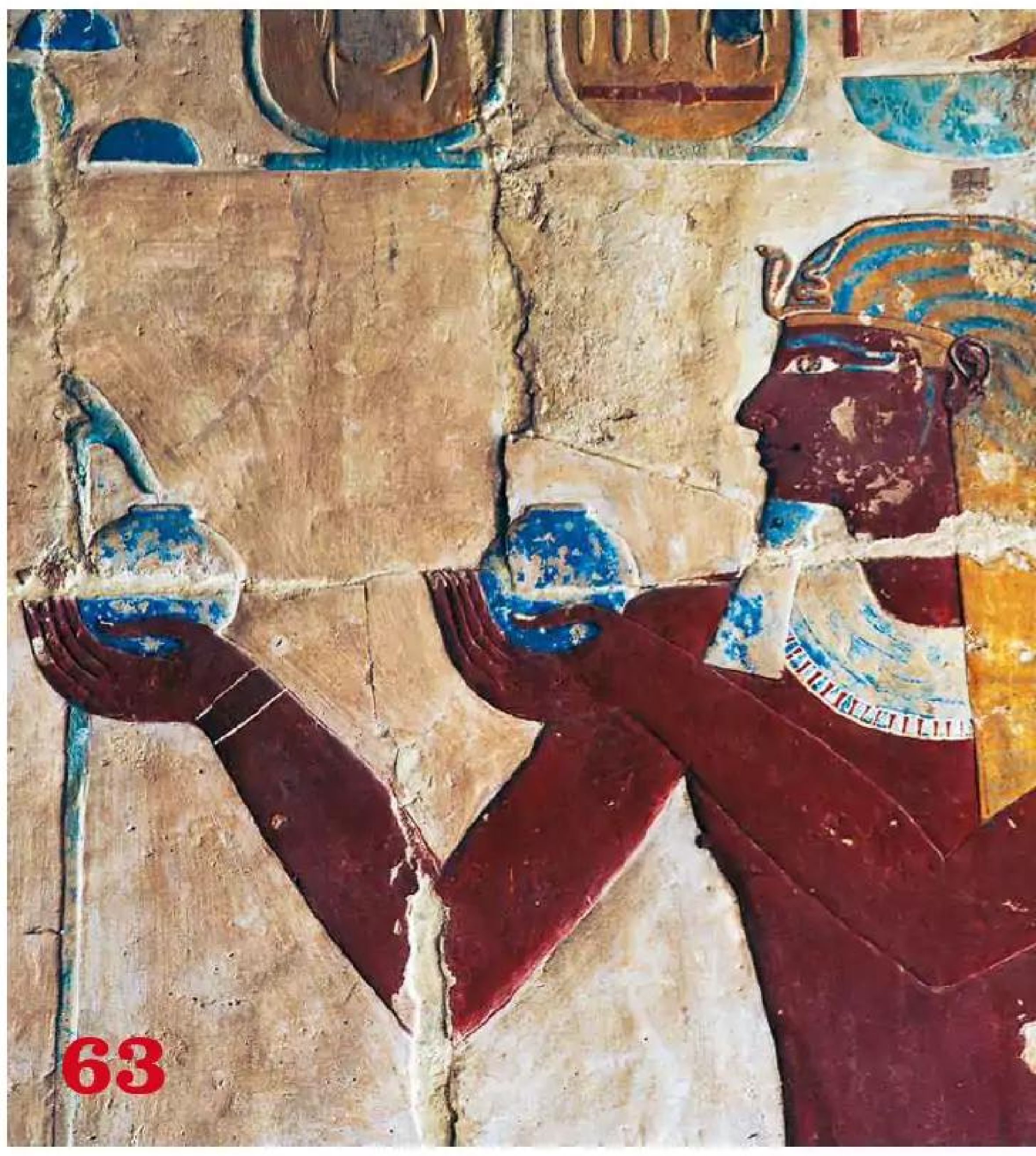

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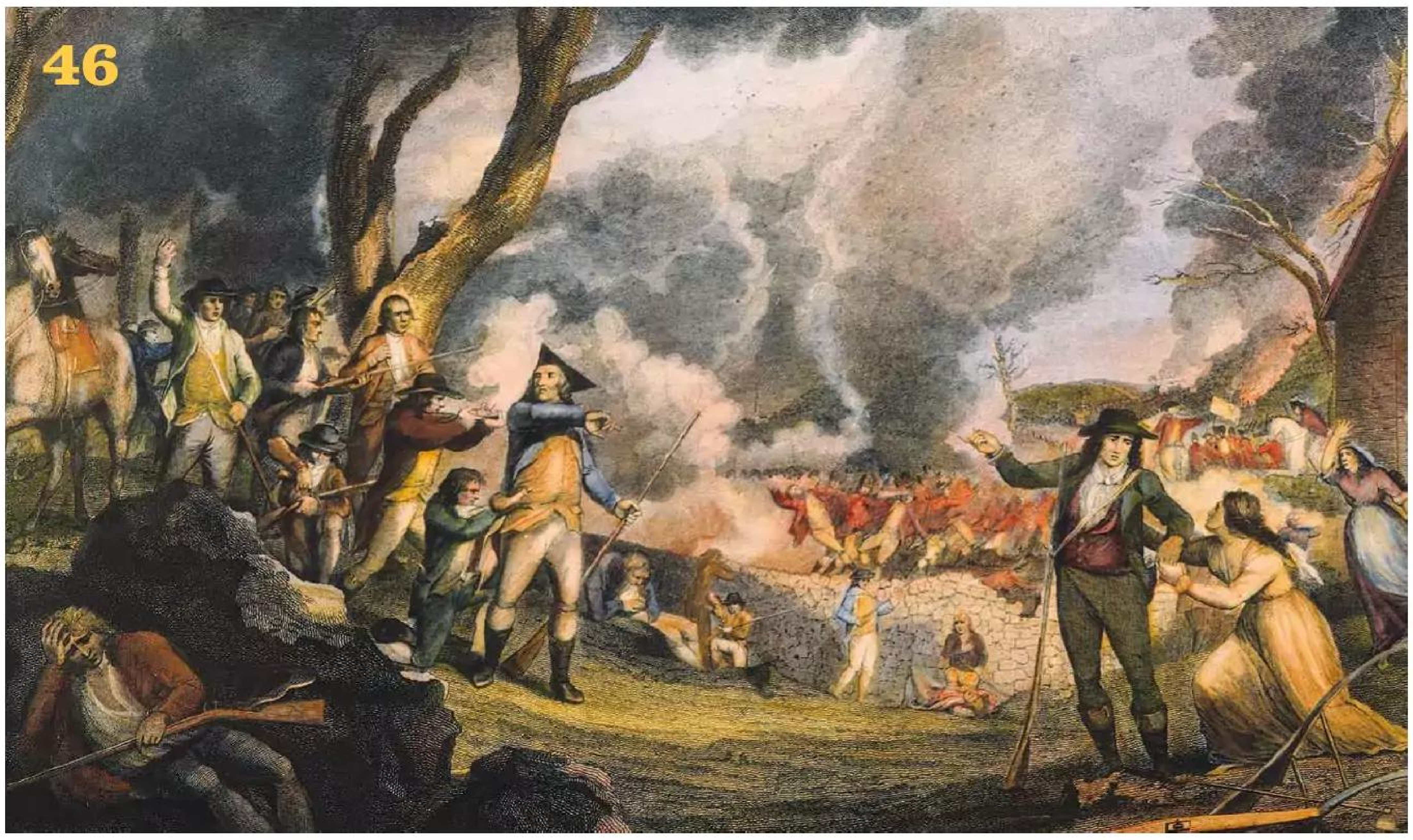
22 “We walked home feeling as if a huge cloud had lifted off our shoulders”



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ANNIVERSARIES

DANNY BIRD highlights events that took place in May in history

4 MAY 1493

Pope Alexander VI divides the planet

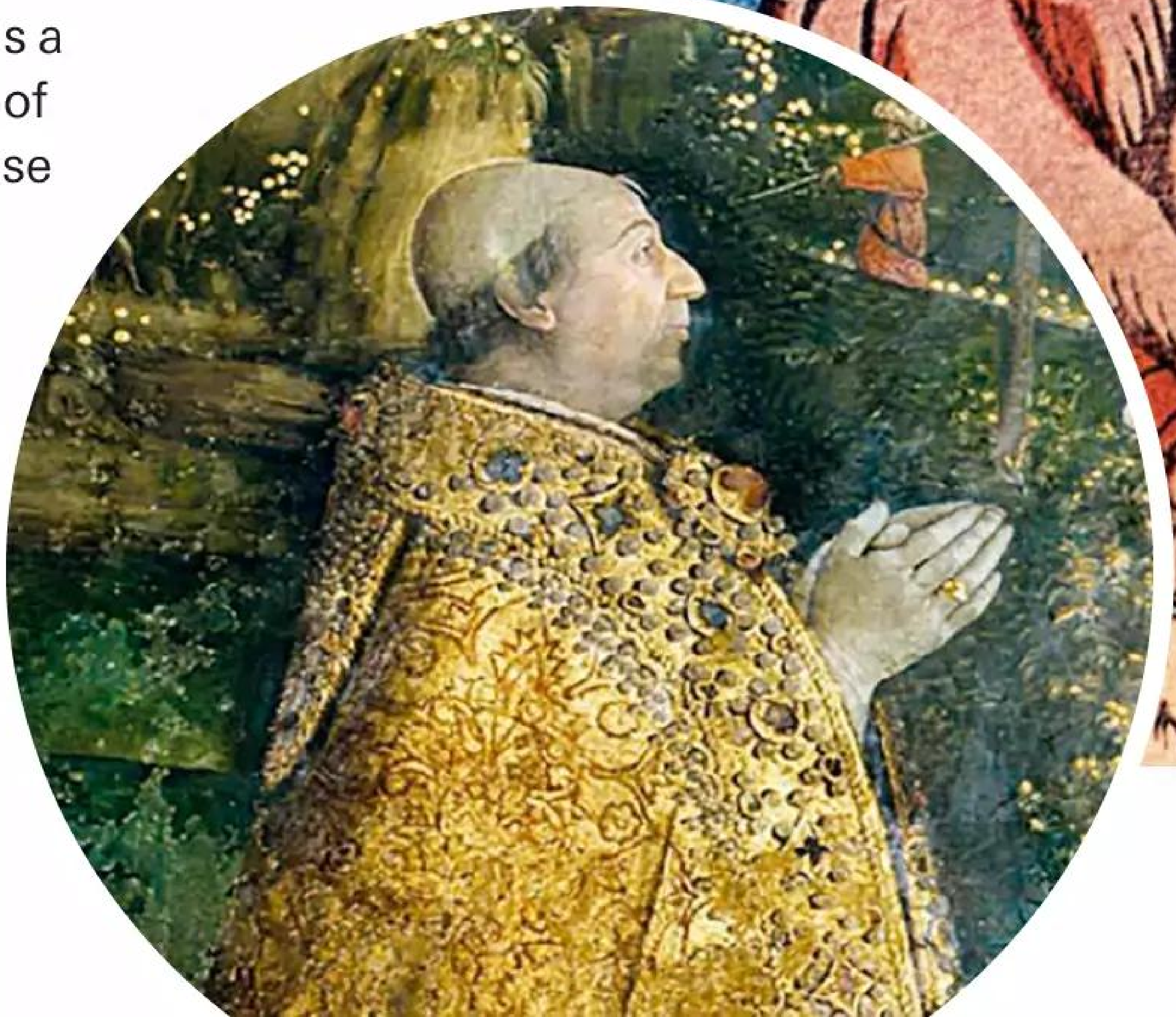
A papal decree gives Spain sweeping rights to the New World

When Pope Alexander VI issued the papal bull titled *Inter caetera* on 4 May 1493, he gave Spain exclusive rights to colonise land not yet ruled by Christians in the New World. The Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile, were granted unknown lands west of an imaginary line set 100 leagues (around 320 miles) west of the Azores and Cape Verde islands, in a ruling aimed to quell the intensifying rivalry between Spain and Portugal. The two kingdoms were vying for dominance in the wake of Christopher Columbus's landmark voyage the previous year, and the pope – Spanish by birth – overwhelmingly favoured Ferdinand and Isabella.

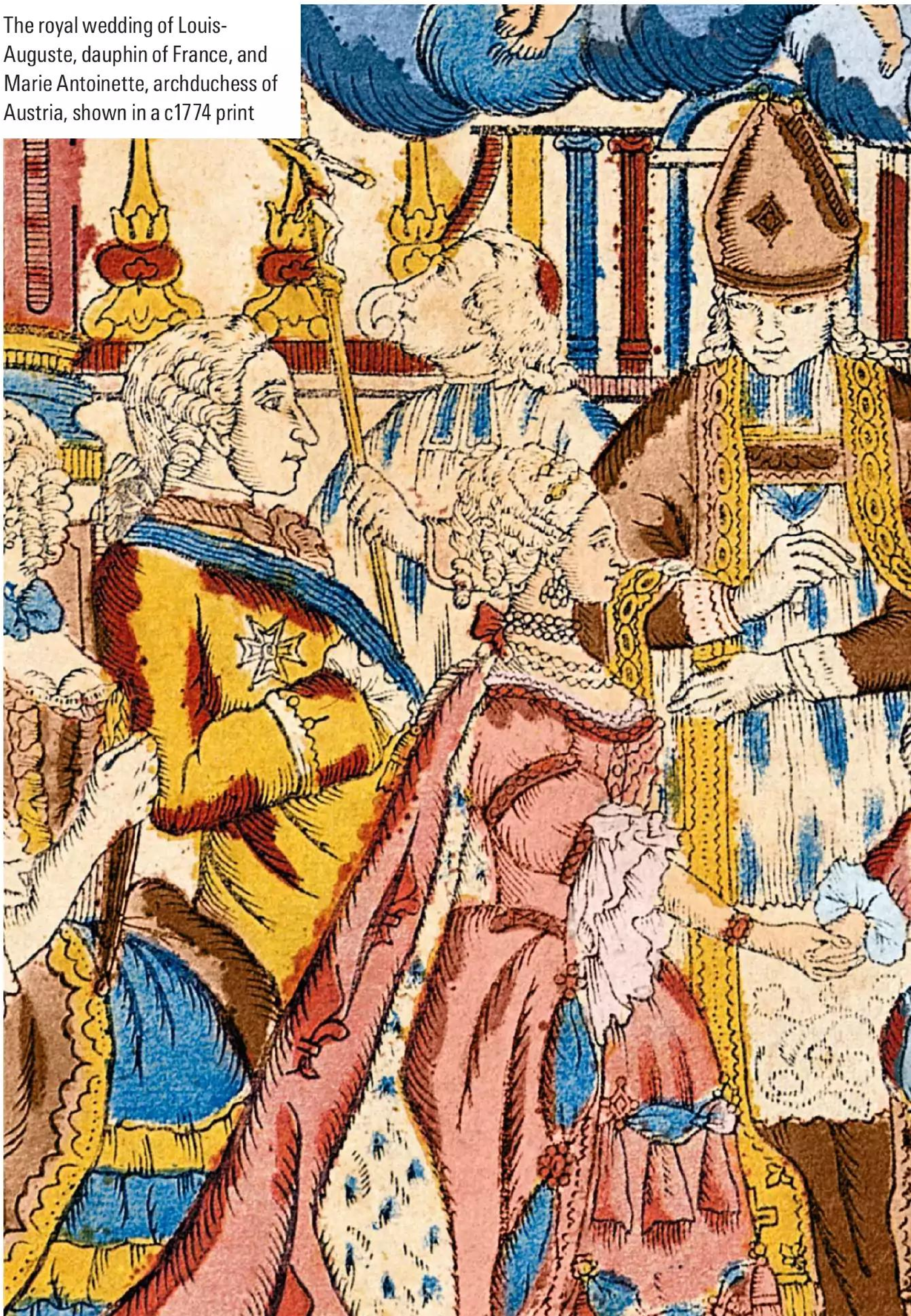
The Portuguese were outraged. King John II, whose explorers had spent decades establishing control along Africa's coastline while seeking a maritime trade route to India, saw his ambitions threatened. Unwilling to accept the pope's terms, he entered negotiations with Spain. This ultimately led to the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, which shifted the line 370 leagues (about 1,185 miles) west of Cape Verde – placing the as-yet unexplored Brazil within Portugal's reach.

Far from the courts of Europe, the decree's consequences had already begun to unfold. Spanish ships had reached uncharted shores where thick rainforests met the ocean. Coastal villages, home to numerous indigenous peoples, lay scattered along the edges of a vast continent unknown to Europeans. Their inhabitants had no knowledge of the invisible lines drawn to divide their ancestral lands.

Within decades, what began as a European dispute brought waves of conquest, enslavement and disease to these peoples. Centuries of colonial expansion were set in motion by the *Inter caetera* bull.



Pope Alexander VI, painted here in 1492–95, signed a papal bull amid an escalating rivalry between Portugal and Spain



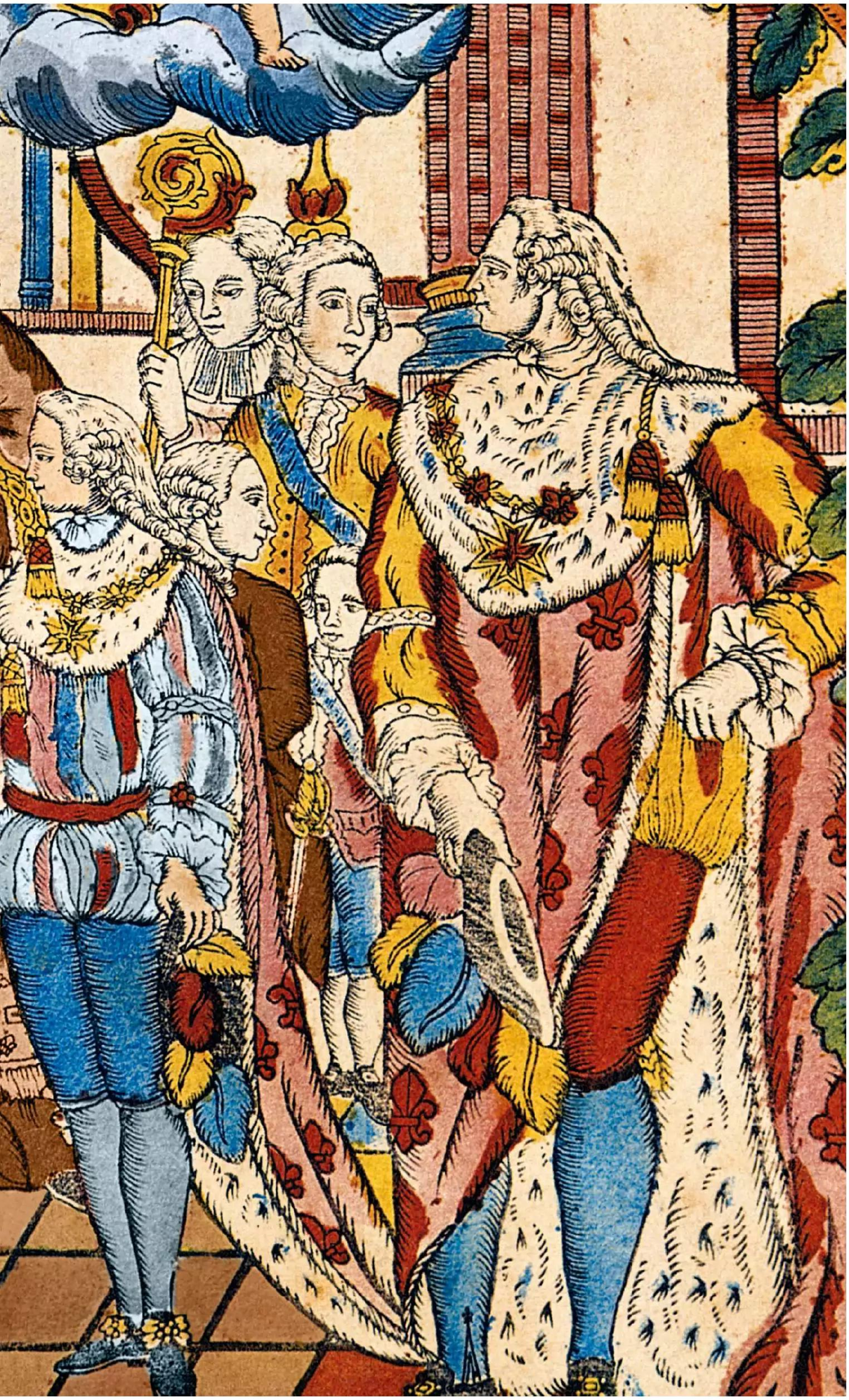
The royal wedding of Louis-Auguste, dauphin of France, and Marie Antoinette, archduchess of Austria, shown in a c1774 print

AKG IMAGES/TOPFOTO

Demonstrators at the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing in 1919. More than 3,000 students joined the protests

4 MAY 1919

Students gather in front of the Tiananmen gate in Beijing to protest the Treaty of Versailles, which gives Germany's colonised lands in China to Japan. The students condemn their government's weak response; protests spread and nationalism surges.



16 MAY 1770

Marie Antoinette marries the French dauphin

Austria and France settle their differences through nuptials

After several weeks of anticipation, Maria Antonia Josepha Johanna (Marie Antoinette, as she was known to the French) and the future Louis XVI were officially wed in the Royal Chapel at Versailles. King Louis XV, ministers and hundreds of courtiers watched as the couple exchanged vows, ending centuries of enmity between the Habsburg and Bourbon dynasties.

The marriage – arranged by Empress Maria Theresa of Austria – had in fact taken place by proxy a month before in Vienna, where Marie's brother stood in for the groom. Then, aged just 14, Marie Antoinette left her homeland, embarking on a 17-day journey to France. She crossed mountains and rivers, to reach the Île aux Épis, where she was symbolically stripped of everything Austrian – gowns, attendants and even her beloved dog – before emerging as the dauphine of France.

The couple met for the first time on 14 May 1770 in the Forest of Compiègne, where the 15-year-old Louis-Auguste greeted his bride. He was shy and reserved; Marie, full of youthful charm, was nervous.

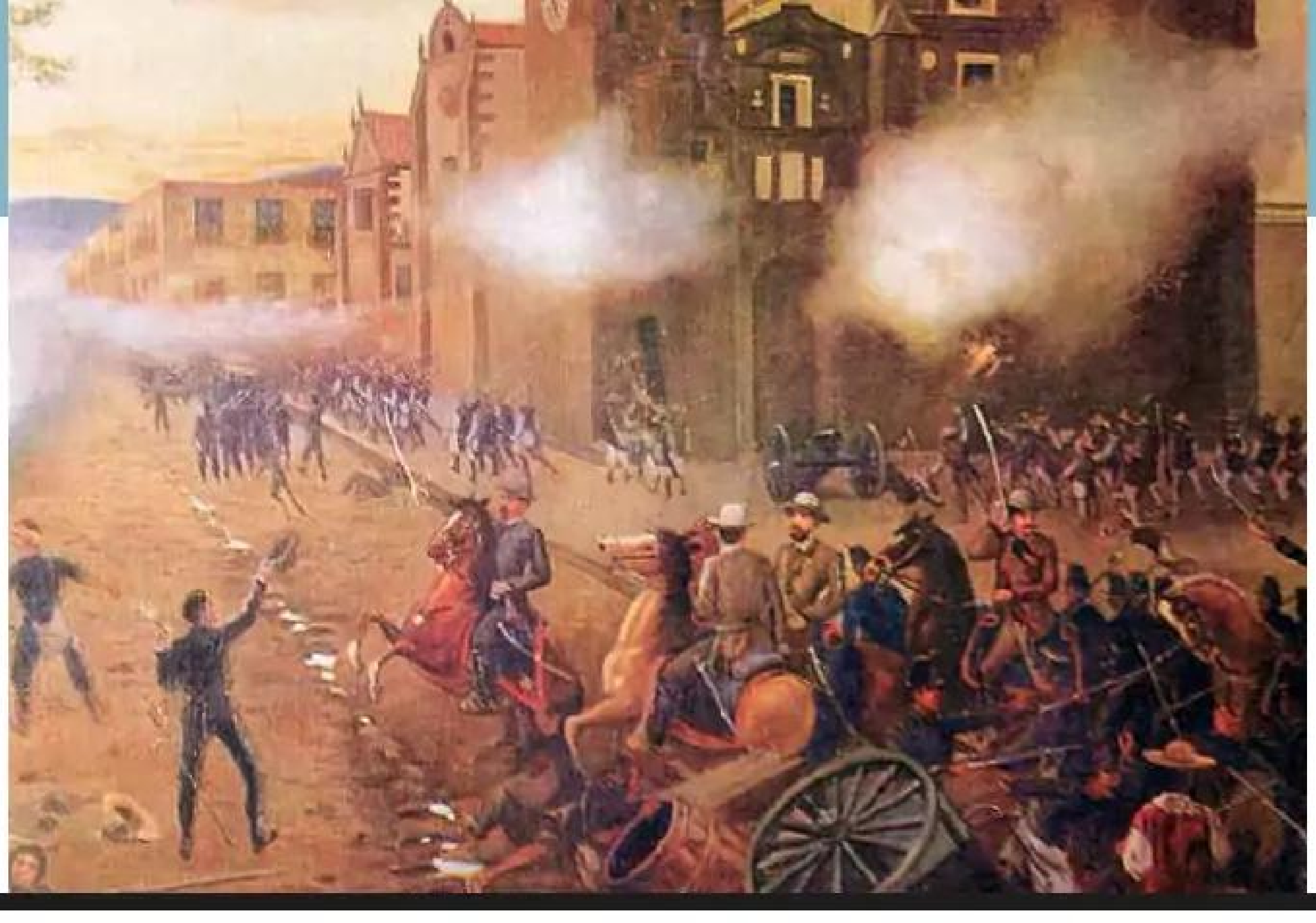
Two days later, their resplendent wedding began. The bride wore an elaborate silver gown adorned with diamonds for the ceremony, while Louis-Auguste, in a gleaming embroidered suit, was visibly emotional during the exchange of rings.

After a reception inside the Hall of Mirrors and a sumptuous feast, the couple participated in the traditional 'going-to-bed' ceremony, during which they lay down in bed in front of the court. Yet their marriage remained unconsummated for years, primarily because of Louis-Auguste's timidity.

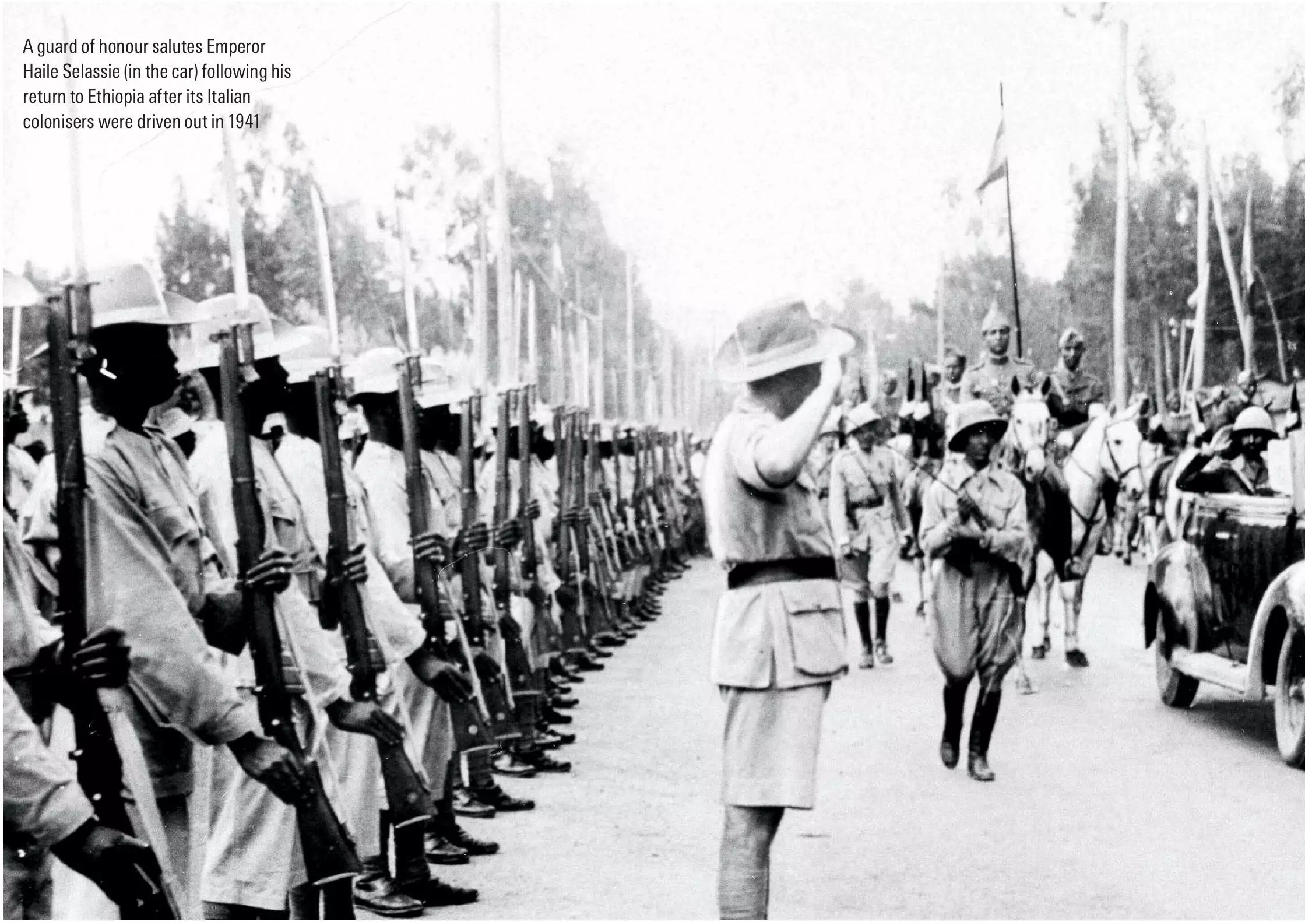
The festivities continued for days, with lavish feasts, music and fireworks, but ended in tragedy. A fire led to the deaths of more than 100 revellers in Paris – a dark omen, perhaps, of the fate that would eventually befall the royal couple.

5 MAY 1862

Mexican forces defeat the French at Puebla, despite being outnumbered. Though not widely commemorated in Mexico, the celebration of the battle, known as Cinco de Mayo, becomes a cultural touchstone for Mexicans in the US.



Mexican cavalry charge French troops at the fortified monastery of Guadalupe during the 1862 battle of Puebla



A guard of honour salutes Emperor Haile Selassie (in the car) following his return to Ethiopia after its Italian colonisers were driven out in 1941

5 MAY 1941

Haile Selassie returns to Ethiopia

The exiled emperor reclaims his throne from Fascist Italy

As dawn broke over Addis Ababa, its golden light roused a city heady with the frisson of liberation. The fractured sculptures of fasces (bound bundles of rods, symbols of Italian Fascism) that had once adorned public buildings and spaces, emblems of Mussolini's five-year dominion, were all that remained of the hated occupier. And beneath the weathered facades, the grandeur of Ethiopia's prewar sovereignty had endured.

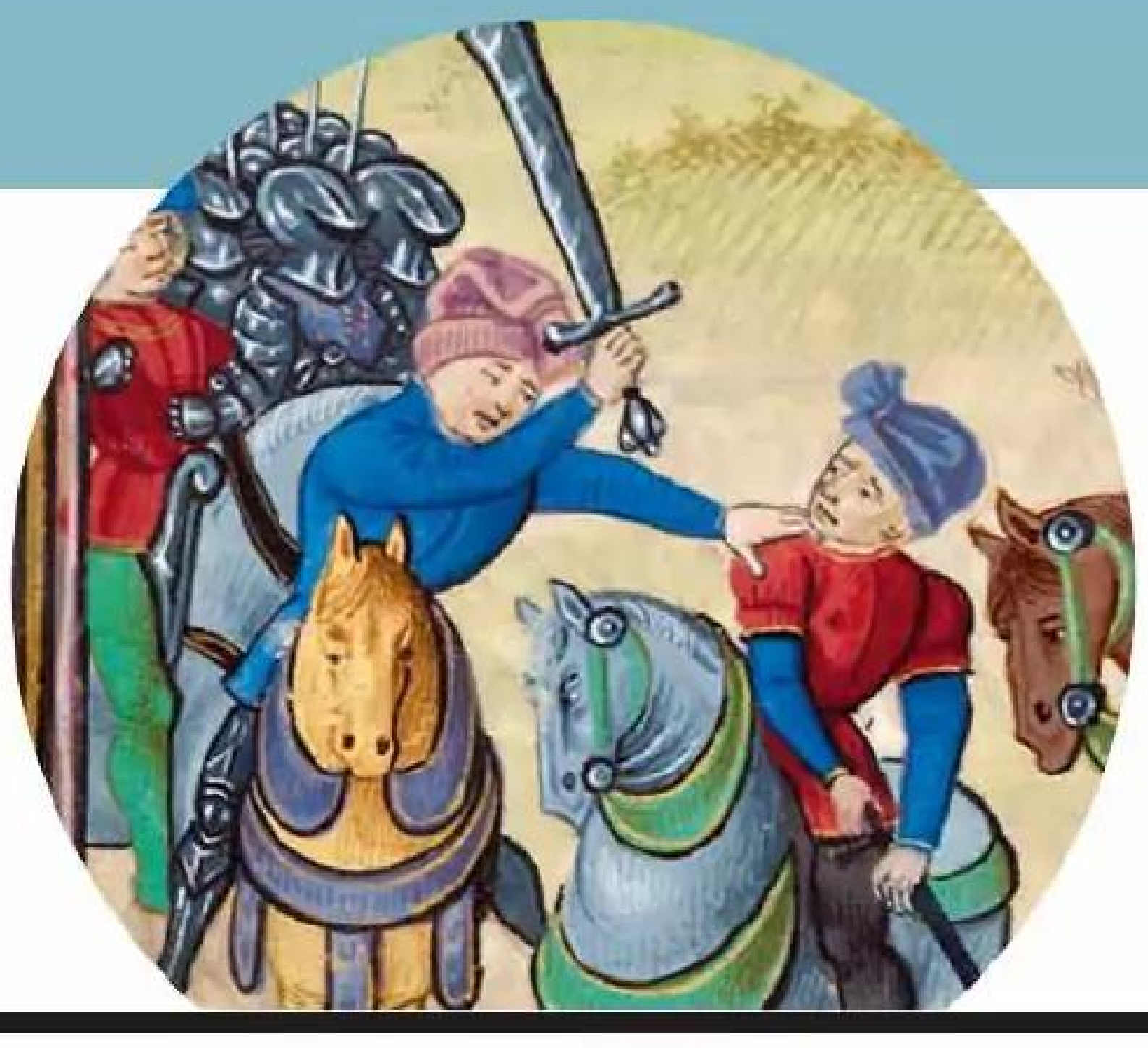
The streets leading into and throughout the capital were crammed with people. Thousands had flocked from the hills, villages and distant corners of the east African empire, gathering in anticipation. Their emperor, the 'king of kings' Haile Selassie, was returning. In the distance, the steady rhythm of marching boots and the occasional whinny of a horse signalled the approach of the liberation force. Among the procession, the emperor sat upright in an open-top car, surveying a sea of jubilant faces.

Five years earlier to the day, Addis Ababa had fallen as Mussolini's forces overran Ethiopia. Selassie and his family fled into exile, eventually securing asylum in Britain, where he resided in the picturesque city of Bath. He had pleaded his country's case before the League of Nations, but those words had gone largely unanswered. His people, though, never surrendered. The Arbegnoch – Ethiopian resistance – had waged guerrilla warfare against the Italians, awaiting the day their country would be free.

With the support of British imperial forces, the resistance had finally reclaimed their homeland. Town by town, ridge by ridge, the invaders had been pushed back. Eventually, Addis Ababa was ceded by the Italians, their once-dominant army now in retreat. The city, however, was not silent. Its citizens had filled its streets, waiting, watching.

As the procession entered the capital, the crowds pressed forward, many genuflecting as their sovereign passed by.

ALAMY/TOPFOTO



Two weeks after the Peasants' Revolt began in 1381, its leader Wat Tyler was beheaded, as depicted in this late 14th-century illustration

30 MAY 1381

The Peasants' Revolt breaks out after tax collectors in Essex demand payment. Villagers resist, attacking officials and refusing unfair levies. Rebellion spreads across England as protesters, led by Wat Tyler, demand justice from King Richard II's government.

Escorting Selassie, Ethiopian warriors marched alongside British and Commonwealth troops, their bayonets glinting in the morning sun. Union Jacks and Ethiopian tricolours depicting the Lion of Judah – the emblem of the imperial dynasty – fluttered in the breeze, carried by soldiers who had fought side by side to break Mussolini's grip.

At the steps of the Imperial Palace, Selassie left the car. Draped in his flowing military coat, he gazed out at his people – then he spoke in voice that, though, weary, was steady: "This day, on which the people of Ethiopia are freed from the oppressive foreign yoke and eternal servitude and on which I am enabled to rejoin my people, whom I love and have yearned for, will be honoured as a holiday to be commemorated annually as a Great Ethiopian Anniversary."

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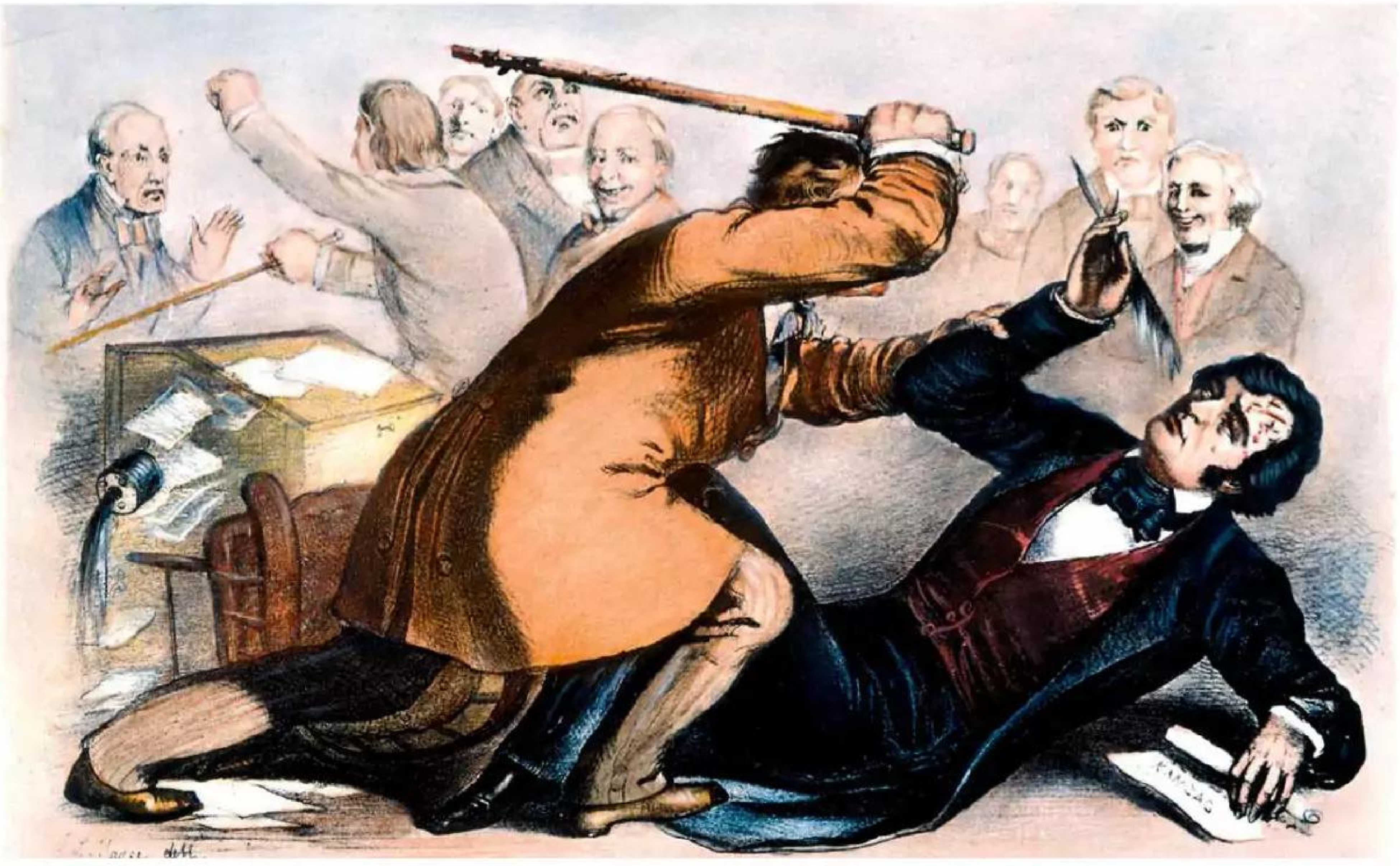

Congressman Preston Brooks attacks Charles Sumner on the floor of the Senate chamber

22 MAY 1856

Preston Brooks assaults Charles Sumner

Blood flows in the US Senate as North and South head towards civil war

When, on 20 May 1856, the Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner delivered a blistering denunciation of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, passions in the US Senate flared. The 1854 legislation had undone restrictions on the expansion of slavery into America's western territories, inflaming tensions between opponents and supporters of slavery.

Sumner's speech condemned those supporters, but it was his scornful attack on South Carolina senator Andrew Butler – mocking his speaking ability, which had been impaired by a stroke – that provoked the most fury. Two days later, on 22 May, violence erupted on the Senate floor.

As Sumner sat at his desk, Preston Brooks – a congressman from South Carolina and Butler's cousin – entered the chamber. Enraged by Sumner's taunts, Brooks approached him with a heavy, metal-topped cane and, without warning, brought it down on his head. Several more blows followed and Sumner was unable to prevent the assault as Brooks continued his brutal beating. Senators froze, too shocked to intervene as the cane splintered against Sumner's skull.

The senator was left unconscious and badly injured, his blood staining his clothes and the floor beneath him. Sumner would be absent from the Senate for three years, recovering from his injuries. Brooks, hailed as a hero in the South, resigned but was quickly re-elected by his constituents.

The incident shocked the nation, further deepening the growing divide between slave states and free states. Brooks was vaunted as a defender of Southern honour, whereas in the North the attack became a symbol of the proclivity for brutality in the South. The shattered cane, discarded on the Senate floor, was later turned into rings – "sacred relics", as its owner crowed – by Southern politicians as talismans of their commitment to the cause. **H**

Danny Bird is content producer on *BBC History Magazine*

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BEHIND THE HEADLINES

"Trump's tariffs are dramatic only if you have a short historical memory"

Tariffs and trade wars have hit the headlines in recent months as US president Donald Trump pursues aggressive economic policies. But are they really so unprecedented? **FRANK TRENTMANN** spoke to Matt Elton about centuries of 'discriminatory taxes'

Is this a new low in US-Canada relations?
Hear more of Frank Trentmann's thoughts on the history behind the trade wars on our podcast soon: *historyextra.com/podcast*

Matt Elton Which historical precedents sprung to mind when you were reading the news about high tariffs being imposed by the US on imports of commodities such as steel and aluminium?

Frank Trentmann States have always tried to control what comes in and goes out. But it's probably worth mentioning, in the current context, that a tariff was one of the first-ever acts of Congress passed by the United States in the late 18th century, mainly as a way to bring money into its coffers. And that's one of the key points we should make about tariffs: although we tend to refer to them generically, they can have many different functions. One is raising revenue; another is to keep out foreign competition to benefit producers at home; yet another is as a negotiating tool, to improve trade or political relations.

The big problem we can see from history is that you can't achieve those three goals simultaneously because they cancel out one another. So nations have come up with a range of different ways to try to reconcile those three aims and to maximise how well they work.

Is it true that, despite variations in form designed to balance those three objectives, tariffs are always taxes imposed on goods and services?

It's important to make the point that a tariff is a discriminatory tax, to distinguish it from a regular revenue duty, which is not set out to be discriminatory. Britain in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, for instance, was a free-trade country which had revenue duties – for example, on beer – but these applied to domestic beer as well as foreign beer. They are so-called excise duties.

> **"Austria-Hungary started a 'pig war' with Serbia in 1906. The current situation is still very far from such dramatic episodes"**

Tariffs only target foreign imports, with the specific purpose of giving home producers an advantage over foreign producers trying to sell their goods in your market, which it penalises. So that's a big distinction.

When we chart how tariffs have been applied, and trade wars have kicked off, throughout the centuries, does it tell us anything to look at the changing nature of the goods involved?

If we take a very broad historical view, the biggest group of interests was the farming lobby – the people who grew the food. The purpose of the British Corn Laws [in force from 1815 to 1846], for instance, was to keep out cheaper foreign wheat, maize and rye to protect and, in a way, subsidise farmers at home. It's obviously the case that, after the industrial revolution, manufactured goods became much more important – so ultimately, the levers are being pulled where the wealth is being created and around which goods the powerful interests are crying out for protection.

Having said that, it's worth noting that the European Union, in 2018, responded to US tariffs on steel by raising its own tariffs on American food and bourbon, as well as on Harley-Davidson motorbikes. As we speak, the EU is again planning to retaliate against President Trump's most recent tariff on steel by hitting back on US poultry, beef and bourbon, as well as steel. And it's also worth remembering that food – in particular, wheat – remains absolutely crucial for survival. In the early 20th century, for instance, there were still major economic conflicts over wheat and pork in continental Europe. Austria-Hungary started a 'pig war' with Serbia in 1906, trying (unsuccessfully) to completely block its pork imports. The current situation is still very far from those dramatic episodes.

Free Traders at the time, of course, pointed out that an 'open door' policy was the best way to secure abundant, cheap food. That is true in peace time. But if your cheap food comes from another country that is hostile or pursues its own interests, that leaves your population extremely vulnerable.

The other thing we need to add into this picture is that, historically, states were much smaller. In terms of economic and social activity, before the 20th century the state was quite limited, which also meant that tax systems were relatively simple compared with those of today. Income tax was only being introduced by most European countries from the 1890s, so taxes on goods and imports were a very important part of state revenue. Fast-forward to the second half of the 20th century, and most states had stopped relying on tariffs or import duties for their revenue – they had income tax, inheritance tax, capital tax, VAT and so on. So, relatively speaking, tariffs are more marginal from a fiscal and economic point of view than they used to be 100 or 200 years ago.

So is the current spate of high tariffs something of a historical outlier?

Not if we take a view of modern political economy across 200 years. For most of that time, the US was protectionist [shielding its domestic economy by taxing imports] – indeed, more protectionist than anything Trump is currently suggesting. When the Republican William McKinley became president in 1897, for instance, his tariffs were almost twice as high as Trump's, and applied to a much wider range of goods. Similarly, the 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act – which implemented blanket high tariffs on thousands of imported goods coming into

Beer craft Workers outside an English brewery, c1900. Although revenue duties were levied on beer during that period, Frank Trentmann stresses the need to distinguish such taxes from tariffs

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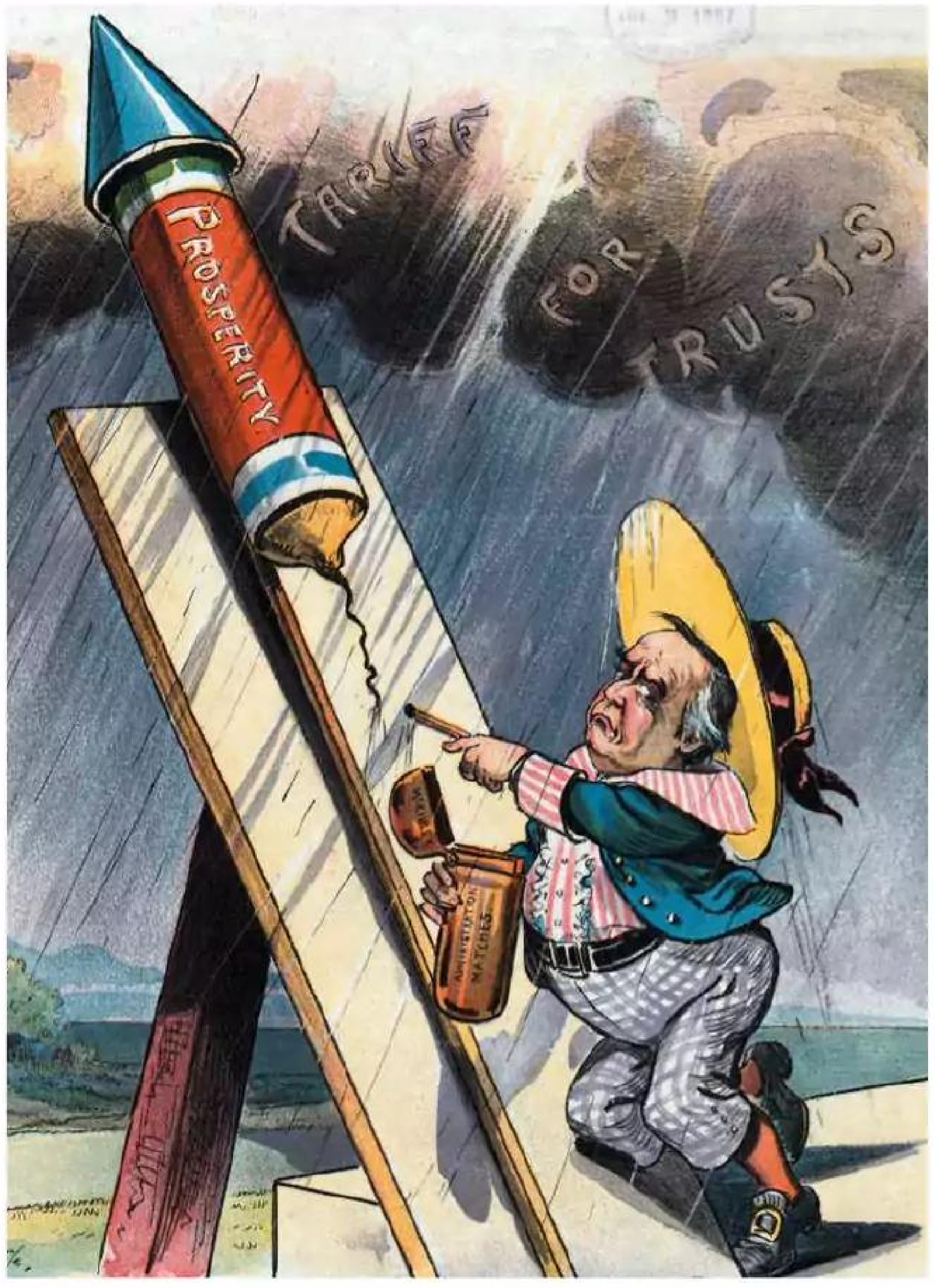
Trade men Republican politicians Reed Smoot (left) and Willis C Hawley speak at a 1929 rally in support of their legislation implementing tariffs on thousands of goods entering the US



Economic touchpaper A cartoon satirising President William McKinley's fiscal strategies – which included heavy use of tariffs

FREE TRADE
1846.

An 1846 'free trade' medal commemorating the abolition of the Corn Laws, which aimed to protect domestic farmers but raised prices

the United States – was punitively onerous, and was criticised by hundreds of economists. Compared with that, we're now in a much milder climate.

What's also true, though, is that the stunned and agitated reactions we've seen in some quarters to these new tariffs are caused by the fact that they come after 70 years of trade liberalisation. In 1947, an international architecture of trade known as the GATT – the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade – was established. This body evolved into its current form, the World Trade Organization (WTO), in 1995. In those postwar years, the US played a crucial role in liberalising trade relations. Tariff levels kept falling throughout the 1950s and 60s, continuing all the way into the 2000s. It was really only in 2017, when globalisation turned backwards into deglobalisation and the first tariff and trade war between the US and China broke out, that the trend was reversed.

In short, if you have a short historical memory, what Trump has been doing in recent weeks does seem pretty dramatic – because it turns around the story that people had become used to across the past 70 years. But if you take a longer view of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, all of this is perhaps a little bit less extreme than many people think.

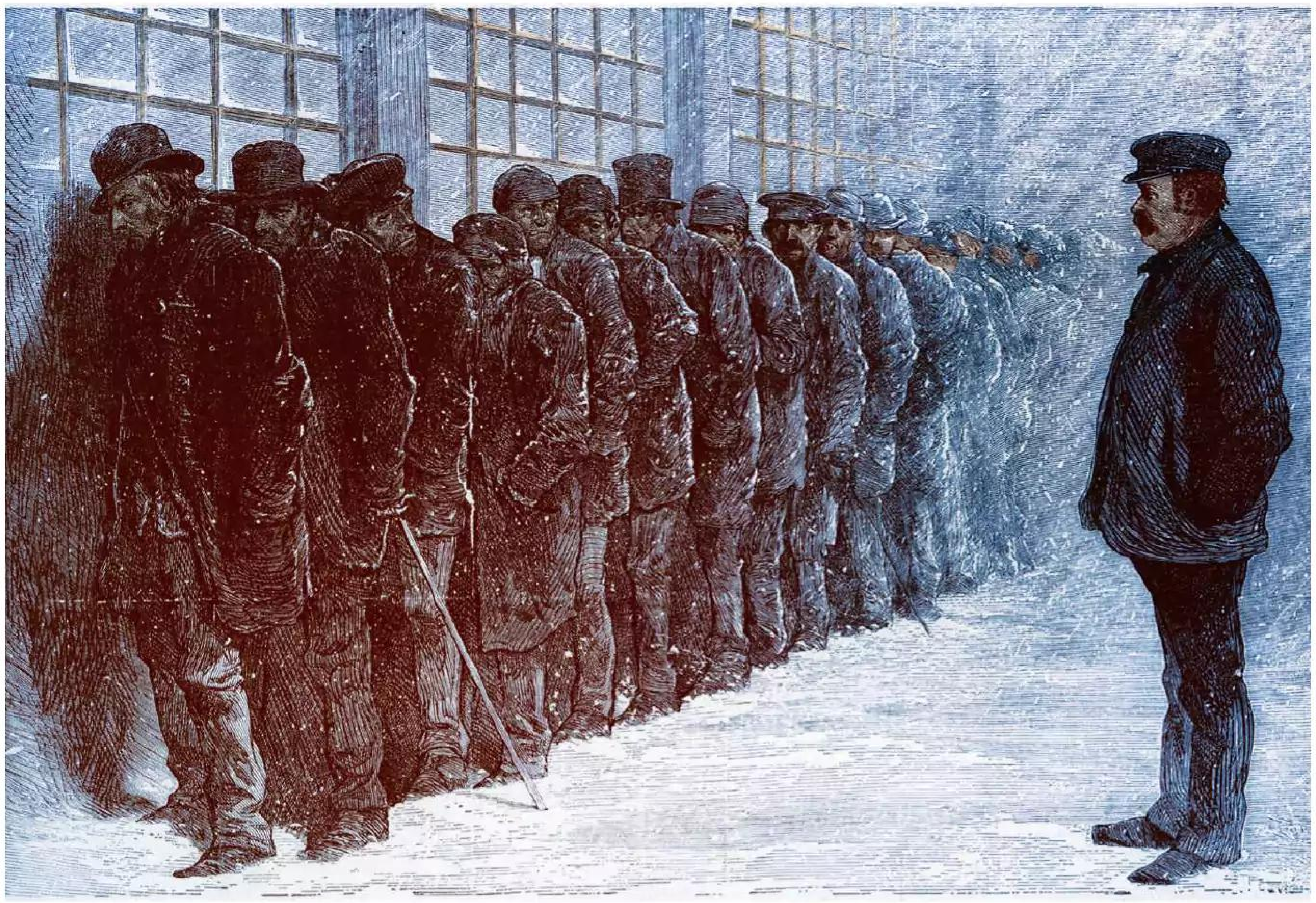
> "The agitation these tariffs have sparked is caused by the fact they come after 70 years of trade liberalisation"

In that case, is it more accurate to view the seven-decade period from the mid-20th century as the historical anomaly?

Yes – though there were actually two long periods that were peculiar and exceptional. One was the mid-Victorian era, when 'Britain ruled the waves' and was the most dominant political and economic power on the planet. During that era, Britain initiated trade liberalisation through trade treaties, which triggered a series of further treaties; over time, more and more European nations adopted what was called the 'most favoured nation clause'.

Effectively, that meant that a nation provided equal terms to all its trade partners. If a country gave preferential treatment to one trading partner (for instance by agreeing

BRIDGEMAN



The poverty line Homeless and unemployed men queue for food on New York's Randalls Island in this 1870s illustration. That decade saw the first major global depression, and an accompanying rise in tariffs

to lower its tariffs), it must automatically extend that same treatment to all other countries with most-favoured nation status. It had a cascading effect and liberalised trade. But then came the first big world depression, which started in 1873, and tariffs began to rise again.

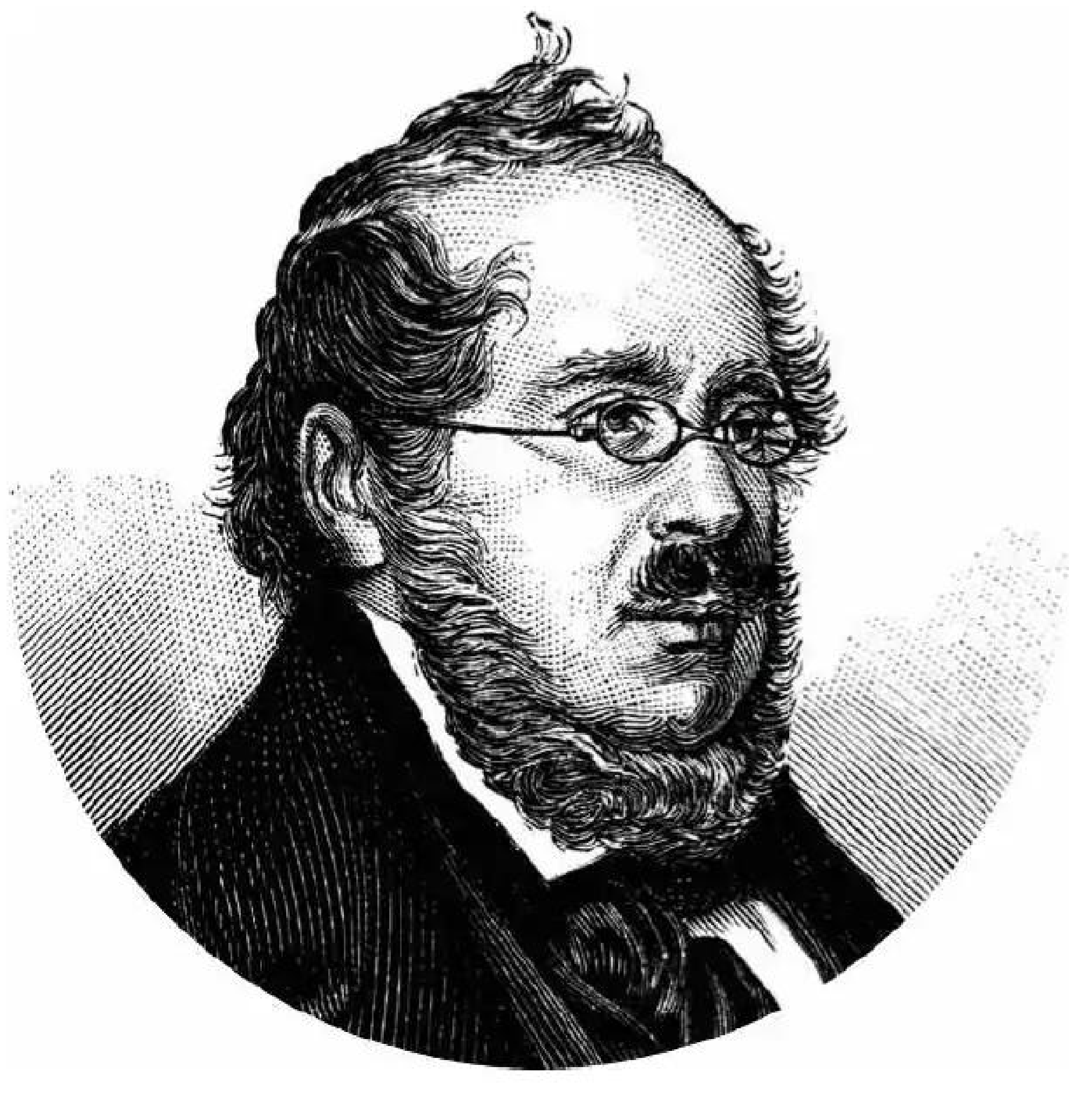
The other exceptional period, which we've already discussed, came just after the Second World War, when the US effectively stepped into the shoes of the British empire to become the global economic, political and military superpower. It advanced and pushed through trade liberalisation, both during the Cold War and afterwards. What's obviously notable about both of those periods is that they featured a single dominant global power. As everyone reading this will appreciate, throughout the past decade we have moved further and further away from that situation of hegemony. The global system, with the rise of China and the continuing resilience of Russia, is now multi-polar, increasingly torn between rival competing great powers.

In a sense, then, is it right to see tariffs as a symptom of that global historical shift?

I think so, and I also think we need to get away from seeing tariffs only in economic terms – because for Trump, they are much more than that. They are an integral part of a wider territorial view – that the American economy *is* the land of the United States and the resources, raw materials and the people in that land. In this territorial conception, trade exchange is not seen as mutually beneficial but instead a system in which there is always a winner and a loser.

The interesting thing to add here is that we shouldn't see this as an intrinsically American perspective, because the person who probably had the greatest influence in spreading protectionist ideas was a German: Friedrich List, an entrepreneur and economist who was persecuted by his homeland, the kingdom of Württemberg, and who fled into exile to the US in 1825 for criticising the government. He went on to support the protectionist campaign in US politics, and criticised liberal British economists and thinkers who argued for the mutual benefits of trade.

List's argument was that two trading nations were rarely equal, and that the stronger nation would use trade to advance its interests – so a nation that was the smaller, weaker partner in this relationship would end up at a disadvantage permanently. Weaker countries, therefore, should protect their 'infant industries' so that they could grow to full strength. List's national economic view became a widespread international conception of how the economy works, and the way in which economic development is tightly related to national strength and security.



Friedrich List as depicted in a 19th-century engraving. The economist's ideas were to prove hugely influential around the world

So should we avoid seeing the story of tariffs and trade wars as emblematic of the US and its history?

Well, consider another aspect of William McKinley's story. He introduced a very aggressive regime of tariffs when he came to power – but, a few days before he was assassinated in 1901, he had a bit of a rethink and came to the conclusion that, actually, tariffs didn't work as well as he'd thought. He planned to wind them back – but was shot before he could do so.

I'd highlight that back and forth between a protectionist and a commercial vision as a key part of American history. Everyone knows the story of the Boston Tea Party [of December 1773]: how the Patriots, in their fight for independence from the British empire, sponsored a view of economic nationalism. They were all for making and wearing homespun local goods and abstaining from foreign imports, including the tea that got dumped into the harbour.

So there's one conception of the American Republic that is very territorial and aims to be as self-sufficient as possible, and another that sees trade as mutually beneficial and closer to the liberal economic thinking that's often held sway in Britain and Europe. Those two viewpoints have always been in conflict: in the 1920s and early 1930s, for instance, the United States shifted dramatically to the protectionist side, but then, in the 1930s and early 1940s under Franklin D Roosevelt and his secretary of state, Cordell Hull, the nation shifted back towards trade liberalisation.

It's so interesting that, amid these huge economic and historical sweeps, there was an ongoing push and pull of intellectual ideas between individuals operating on an international stage.

Yes, it is. These are not anonymous forces we're talking about here, and they're not just economic interests, either. For a really long time, from the late 18th to the early 20th

BRIDGEMAN

RADCLIFFE &PILKINGTON CO-OPERATIVE
WOMEN'S GUILD

Political currency
Members of the Radcliffe and Pilkington Women's Guild pose for a photograph, c1910. Many campaigning groups, including feminist organisations, were spurred to action by the need to defend free trade as an essential part of an accountable democracy

ALAMY

century, the question of tariffs and free trade was a big political issue. Entire social movements, and many marginal and excluded groups, organised around them.

In Britain, it was the issue that first prompted women's groups to hold big public political meetings. The Women's Cooperative Guild was the first independent political lobby group by women for women, and the defence of free trade and defeat of tariffs was really core to its feminist politics. That's because tariffs have political consequences – they benefit powerful lobbies and groups – so democratic defenders of free trade made the point that what was really at stake was an open, transparent and accountable democratic system. If you have tariffs, then those powerful lobbies are likely to try to use parliament to arrange them in a way that benefits them, at the expense of consumers.

Finally, are there other recent shifts in the story of trade wars and tariffs that help illuminate the current situation?

I think that they occupy a different place in the political imagination compared with the early 20th century. That period saw enormous popular political conflicts break out over the subject of tariffs – not just in Britain, but also in places such as imperial Germany, where major upheavals were caused by proposed tariffs on goods including meat. That's because, as well as being in some cases a life-or-death issue, provision of these goods was also seen as fundamental for the strength of the entire nation.

> **" We may not like it if the price of eggs goes up, but it's no longer an issue that pushes people on to the barricades "**

We're in a different world now. Yes, the latest round of tariffs has made the headlines. But it's not as if consumers are out in the streets in mass demonstrations as a result. So a key thing to appreciate is that, across the past 100 years, issues of tariffs and free trade have for many people lost their political salience. We might not like it if the price of eggs goes up, but it's no longer a question of political identity or something that pushes people on to the barricades.

Why is that the case? Well, as I mentioned, the state has been transformed over the past century to become a much larger entity. Many states now have social security systems which mean that increases in the price of bread, for example, are no longer a matter of life or death, because the state cushions and absorbs the impact of that increase to a degree. And, for the state itself, tariffs are not that big a deal because it has other sources of revenue.

But another key thing that's happened is that, after 1945, trade politics moved out of the local sphere and into the supranational. Trade liberalisation is now largely discussed behind closed doors by experts and bureaucrats in organisations such as the WTO, and is no longer really part of popular political culture. Big protests do still happen outside the meetings of powerful nations – in Genoa [by anti-globalisation campaigners at the G8 summit in 2011], for instance. These aren't insignificant – but they're no longer part of mainstream politics.

Frank Trentmann is professor of history at Birkbeck, University of London. His books include *Out of the Darkness: The Germans, 1942–2022* (Penguin, 2023) and *Free Trade Nation* (OUP, 2009)

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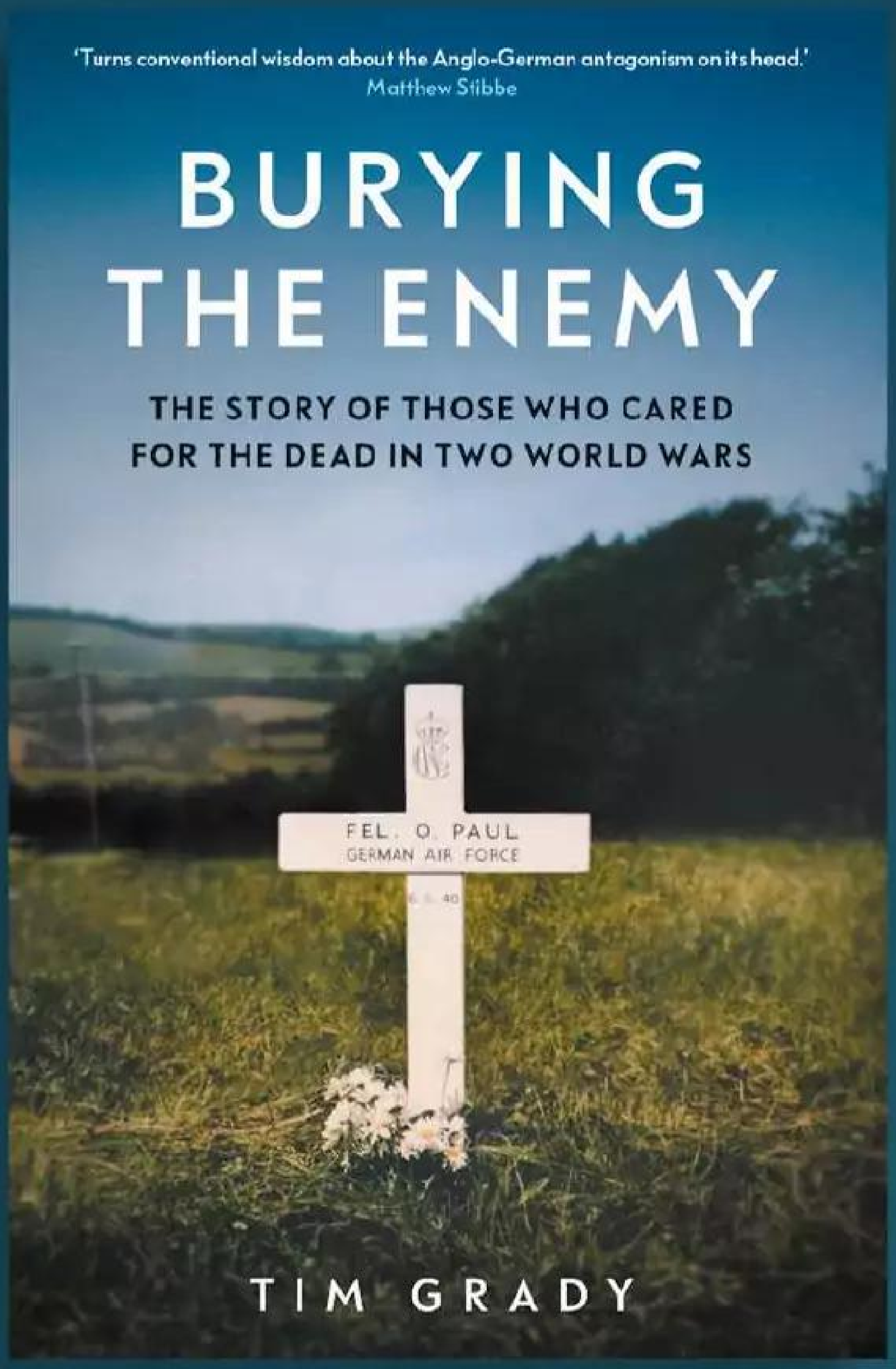
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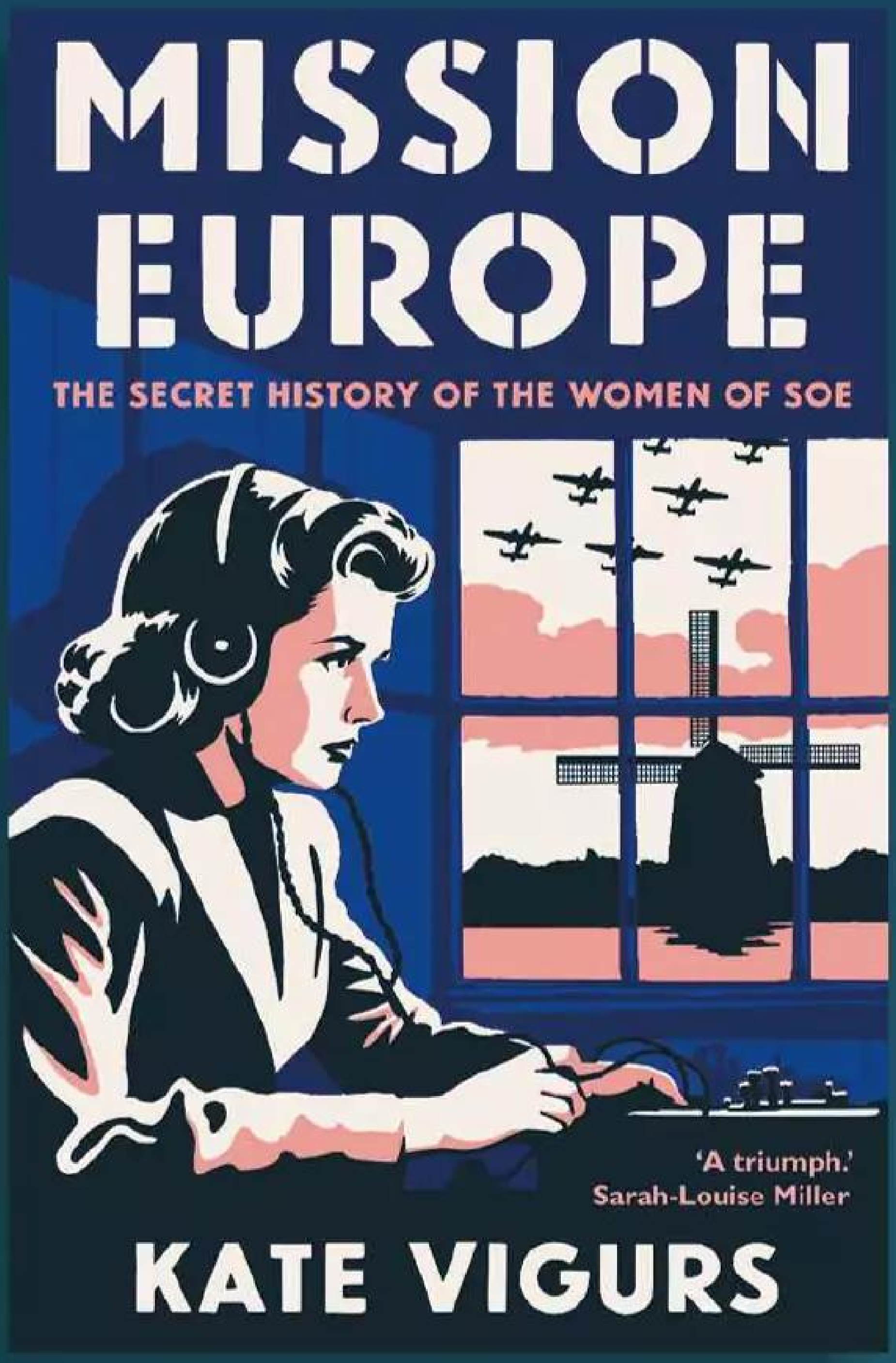
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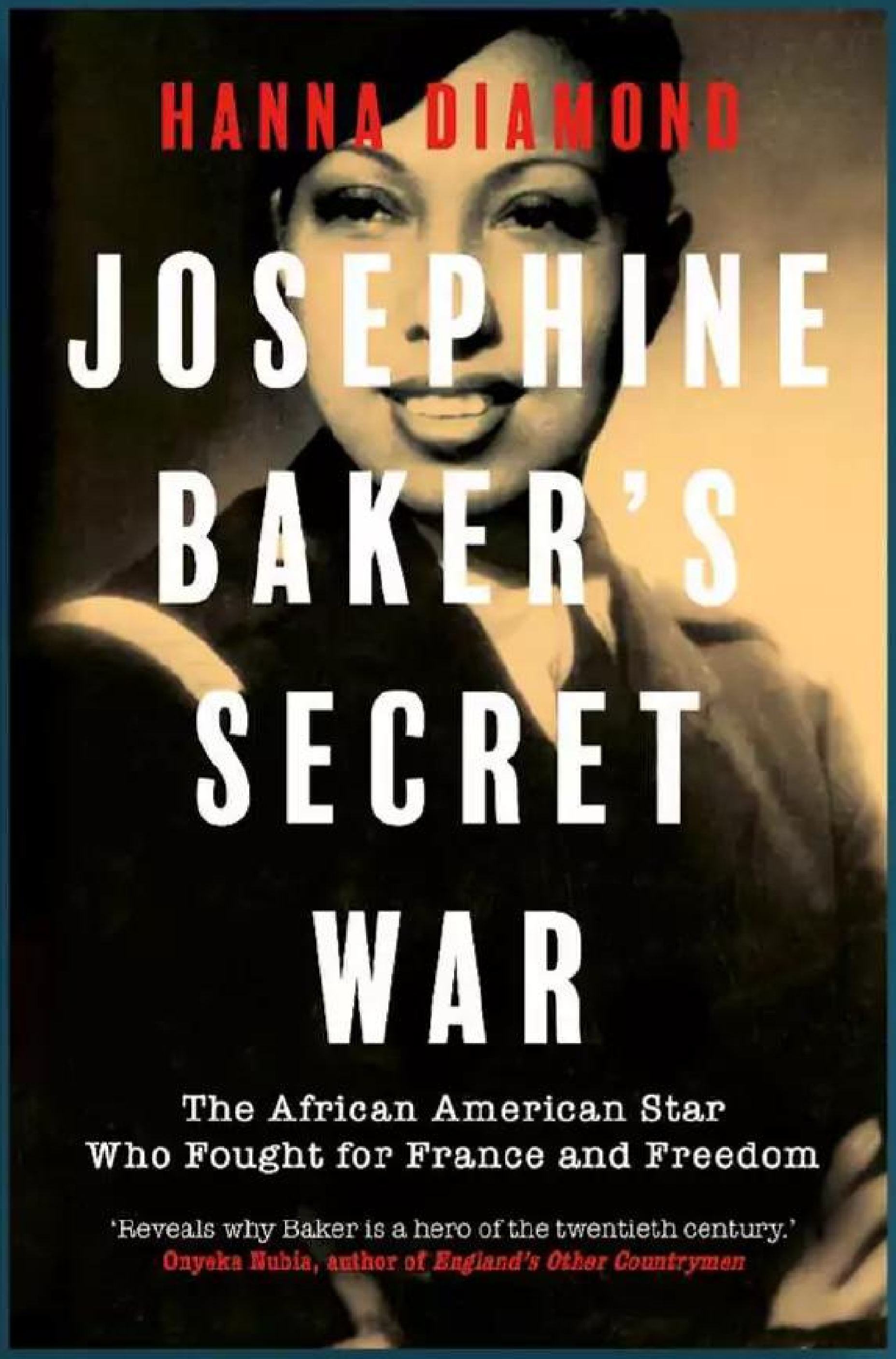
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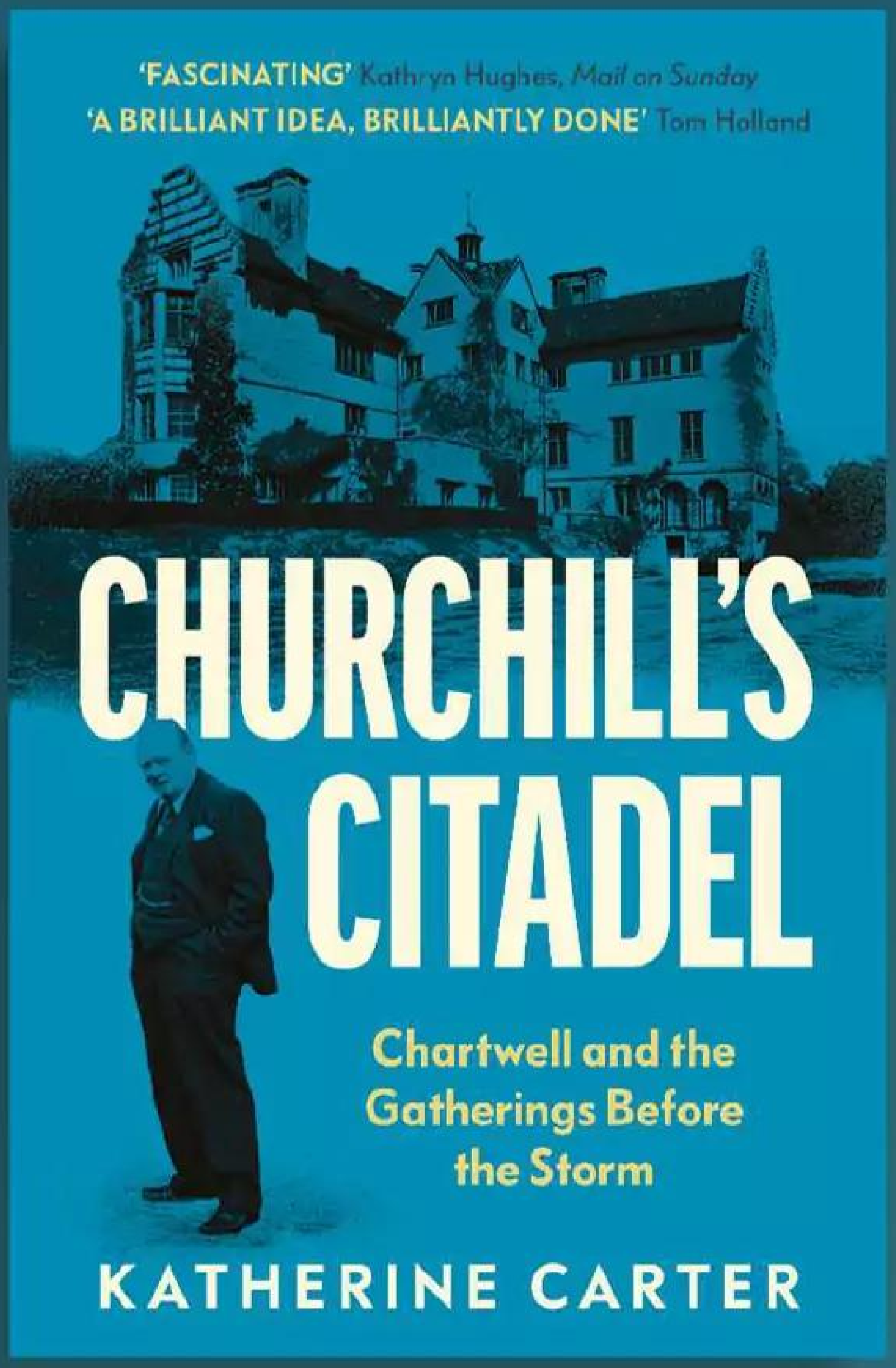
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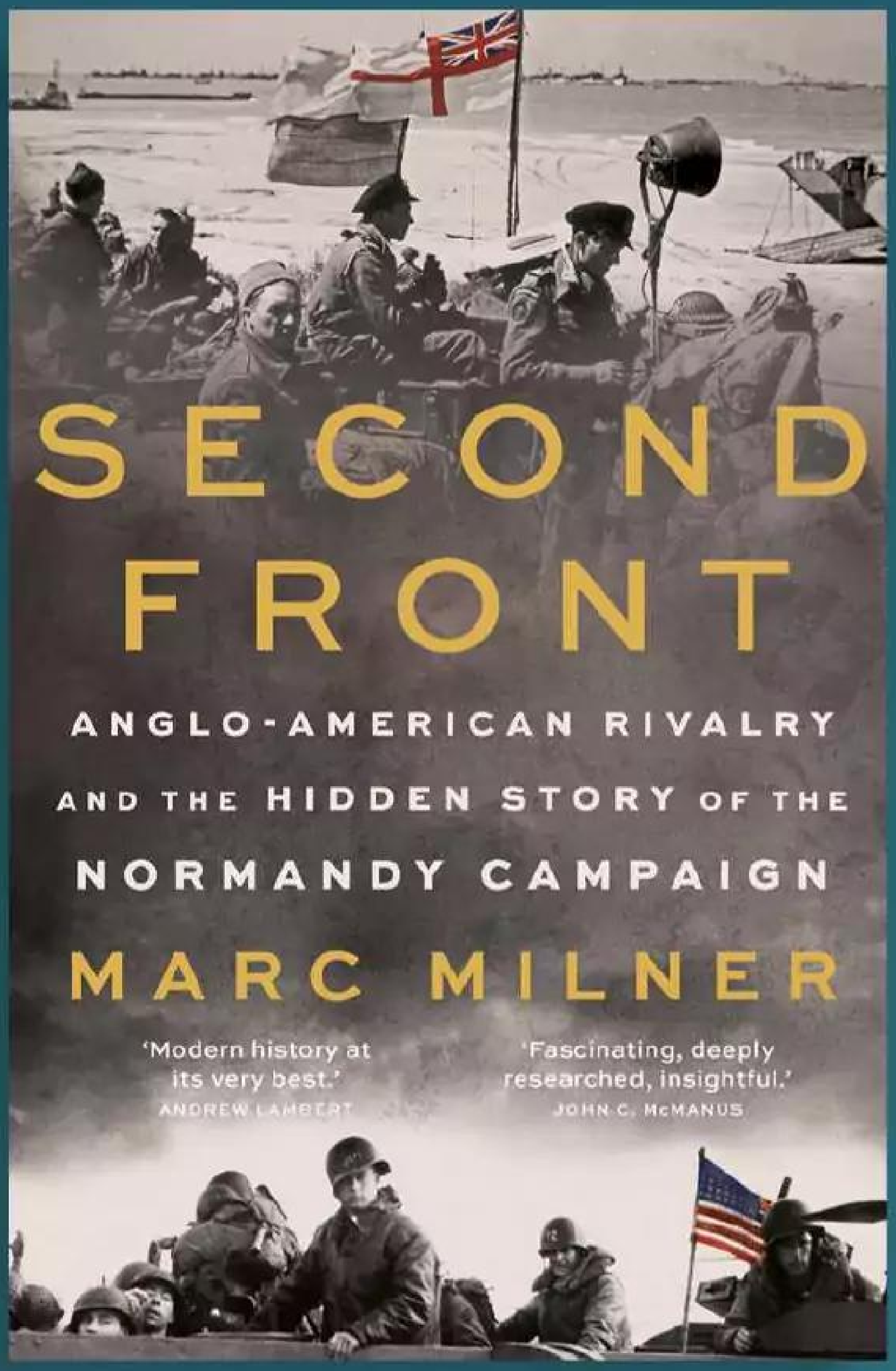
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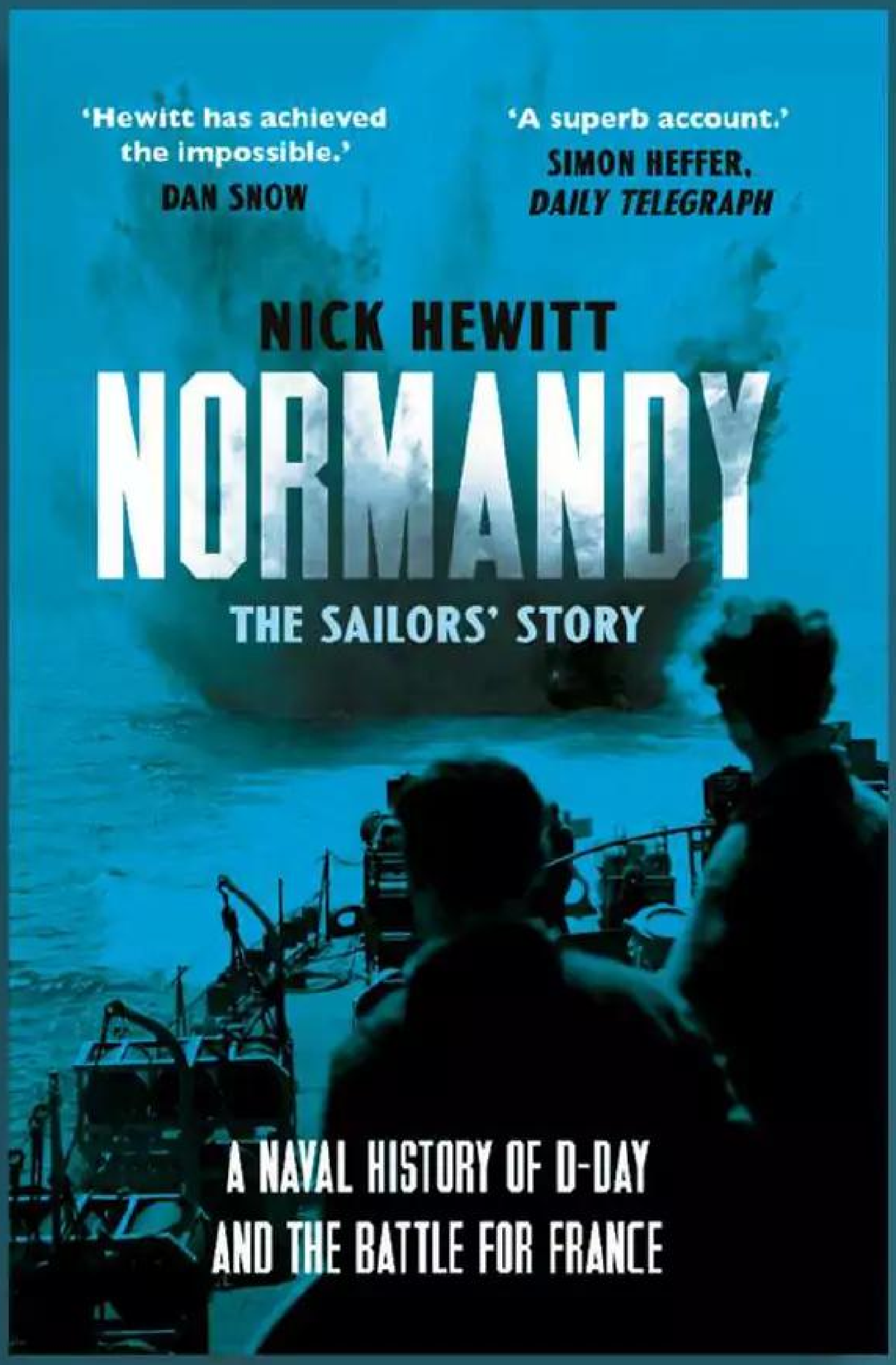
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MICHAEL WOOD ON…

A TREASURE TROVE OF MEDIEVAL DOCUMENTS

“Globalism is ironing out the fabulous texture and diversity of the old world”

COMING FROM INDUSTRIAL MANCHESTER IN the cold, rainy north of England, I have loved the Mediterranean all my life. The wondrous diversity of landscapes, cultures and histories, and the peoples around its shores – all are an inexhaustible delight.

Recently, I’ve gone back to an old favourite book, *A Mediterranean Society* by Shelomo Dov Goitein. Published from 1967, it’s never included in those ‘great historians’ debates, but it is a masterpiece. A portrait of medieval merchant communities in the eastern Mediterranean, its canvas is huge, stretching across Europe to India, and from Morocco to Crimea. It centres on one of the world’s most amazing historical archives: the Cairo Geniza (‘storeroom’ in Hebrew) of the Ben Ezra synagogue in Fustat, Old Cairo – a stone’s throw from the Nile.

A windowless box of a room on the second floor, reachable only via a rickety wooden ladder, by the 19th century it was stacked floor to ceiling with boxes of documents. A photo from 1898 shows some of them: heaped, crumbling, wrapped in cloth, crammed in wooden tea chests. These were the business documents – and so much else – of medieval Jewish merchant communities, and are especially rich for the period 950–1250. There were 400,000 of them – the largest and most diverse collection of medieval manuscripts anywhere in the world.

The Geniza was one of hundreds that once existed in the hyper-literate society of the medieval Levant. They survived because Jewish tradition dictated that Hebrew script was sacred and should not be thrown away but stored or buried reverently in a cemetery.

Removed from Egypt in 1897, this incredible treasure trove is now divided between many libraries, with the majority of the documents in Cambridge. After the Second World War, Goitein – already a great scholar in the languages of the Near East – decided to dedicate the rest of his life’s work to the archive. The result was his portrait of the Geniza in five volumes, the last of which went to the publisher on the day he died in 1985. There were many other offshoots, too, including a fantastic book of medieval letters from the India trade annotated and translated by Goitein and a colleague.

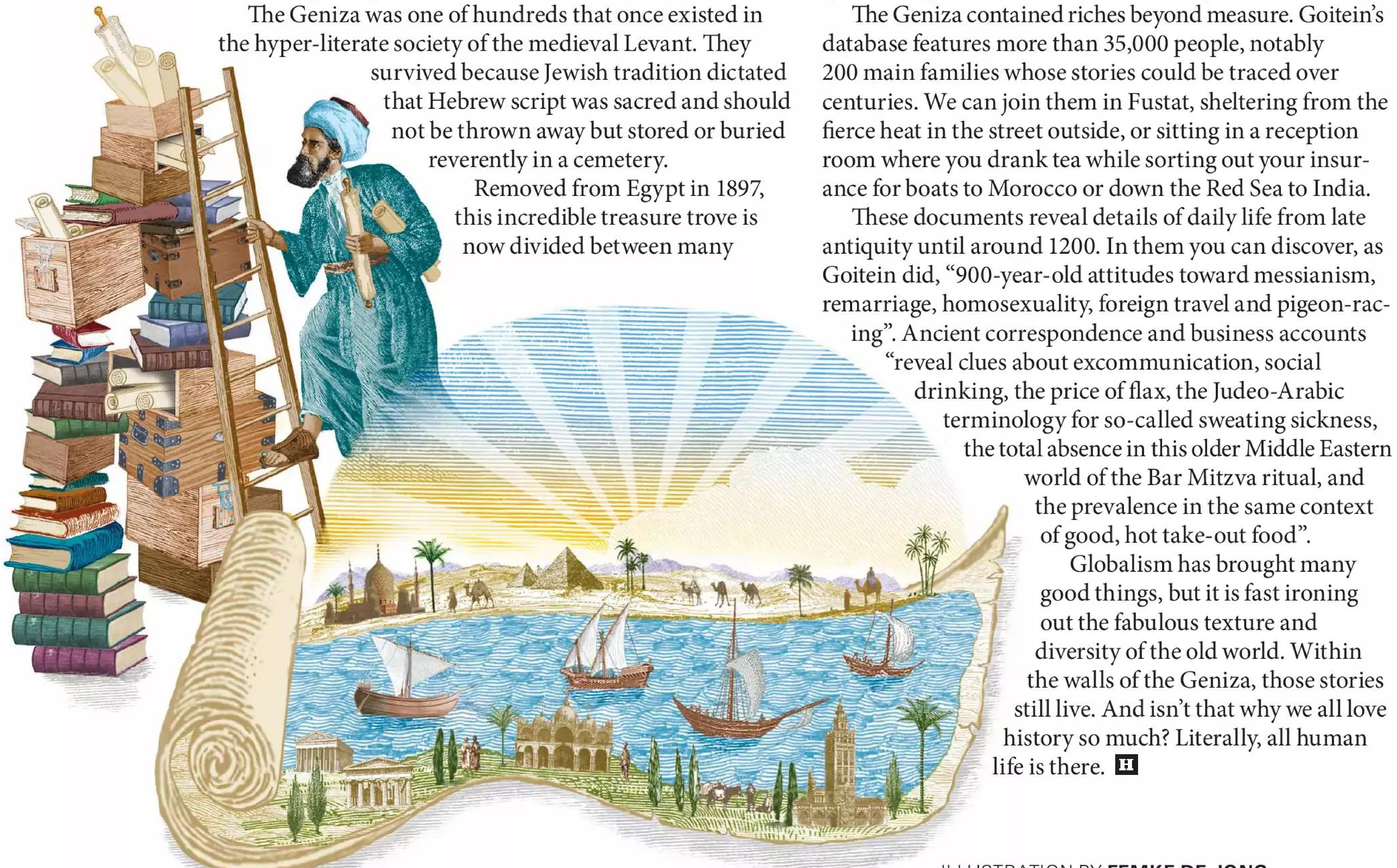
The documents in the Geniza include a vast range of texts. As well as business records there are materials with philosophical, legal, scientific, mystical and linguistic contents, school exercises, merchants’ account books and communal records. Especially fascinating is the huge correspondence comprising thousands of documents dating from the ninth to the 13th centuries.

There are letters from Jewish traders en route from Egypt and Tunisia to Yemen and ultimately to India. Their business ties went to Seville and Samarkand, even to Kyiv and Rouen; their ports included Marseille, Genoa and Venice. We read in Viking-age sources from western Europe about Jewish merchants who spoke Persian, Arabic, Aramaic, Latin and Greek – and here they are, motors of a new world driven not by violence and conquest but by trade, exchange, contacts, profit and loss.

The Geniza contained riches beyond measure. Goitein’s database features more than 35,000 people, notably 200 main families whose stories could be traced over centuries. We can join them in Fustat, sheltering from the fierce heat in the street outside, or sitting in a reception room where you drank tea while sorting out your insurance for boats to Morocco or down the Red Sea to India.

These documents reveal details of daily life from late antiquity until around 1200. In them you can discover, as Goitein did, “900-year-old attitudes toward messianism, remarriage, homosexuality, foreign travel and pigeon-racing”. Ancient correspondence and business accounts “reveal clues about excommunication, social drinking, the price of flax, the Judeo-Arabic terminology for so-called sweating sickness, the total absence in this older Middle Eastern world of the Bar Mitzva ritual, and the prevalence in the same context of good, hot take-out food”.

Globalism has brought many good things, but it is fast ironing out the fabulous texture and diversity of the old world. Within the walls of the Geniza, those stories still live. And isn’t that why we all love history so much? Literally, all human life is there. **H**



Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series. His books include *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2021). You’ll find him on X at *MichaelWoodMV*

B B C

FRAN MONKS

ILLUSTRATION BY **FEMKE DE JONG**

HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI on the urgent need to commemorate historical famines

"Social taboos are violated: a parent must decide which child to feed"

Kavita Puri is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4. Her latest BBC Sounds podcast, *Three Million*, charts the 1943 Bengal Famine and won Gold in the New Podcast category at the 2024 British Podcast Awards

DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, DEATHS related to hunger matched or outnumbered military losses. Famines afflicted regions including the Soviet Union, China, India, Vietnam and Greece. Yet those who perished are rarely remembered in the same way as fallen soldiers.

Starvation is not relegated to the past. The latest UN Hunger Hotspots report identifies places of highest concern as Haiti, Mali, Sudan, South Sudan and Palestine. Sadly, the list of countries where hunger persists is much longer, with violence and conflict the key drivers.

Professor Alex de Waal, research professor at Tufts University and a leading expert on famine, explains that part of the reason famines are not remembered and memorialised is that the experience is so painful to recount, and so full of shame, that people want to forget it. In extremis, social taboos are violated: a parent must decide which child to feed; a neighbour refuses to give food to a neighbour; forbidden foods are eaten; people sell their bodies to survive; some profit from scarcity. The authorities who engineered a famine, or who neglected the population, have no reason to remember it, either.

In Ireland, it wasn't until some 150 years after the start of the Great Famine, which began with an outbreak of potato blight in 1845, that victims were widely memorialised. Around a million people died – from a population of fewer than 9 million – and close to 2 million emigrated in a bid to survive.

An expression of remorse by the British government of its role in the famine came only as recently as 1997, though there is still debate about whether the statement issued on behalf of then prime minister Tony Blair constituted an apology. Monuments to the victims and those who fled the country are now dotted around Ireland, Northern Ireland and Britain – though none are in London. There are also significant memorials in places to which Irish people emigrated, mostly the US, Canada and Australia.

In Ukraine, many millions died during the 1932–33 famine known as the Holodomor (literally 'death by hunger'), the result of Stalin's policy of forced agricultural collectivisation. Under the Soviet regime, the subject was taboo; after independence in 1991, though, the famine became central to Ukraine's nation-building project. There are now Holodomor memorials across Ukraine as well as in the countries in which its diaspora settled, including the US and Canada.

Starvation as a weapon of war was not criminalised in the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which governed the treatment of combatants and civilians during conflicts. The first step to revise that was an additional protocol introduced in 1977 stating that "starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited". Just over two decades later, an article in the Rome Statute of the International Court proscribed "intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival", making it a war crime. To date, there have been no successful prosecutions for such acts.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, developed in 2004, identifies five phases of deprivation, with 5 being the most extreme, designated 'Famine/Humanitarian Catastrophe'. The UN has voted that action is mandated only at Phase 5 – when families are at or beyond breaking point, when taboos have already been violated to find food, when widespread malnutrition has set in and mortality rates are high. Critics say that point is far too late.

Memorials to famines are, de Waal says, exceptions to the rule, yet he believes that there is a connection between remembering famines and preventing them. In this 80th anniversary year of the end of the Second World War, as we commemorate those who fought and died in the conflict, we could start by remembering those millions who also perished through starvation.

MAIN: Ukrainian boys collect potatoes from a hidden cache during the devastating Holodomor famine inflicted by Soviet policies in 1932–33 LEFT: A memorial in Kyiv commemorates the Holodomor. Could remembering famines in this way help prevent future catastrophes?

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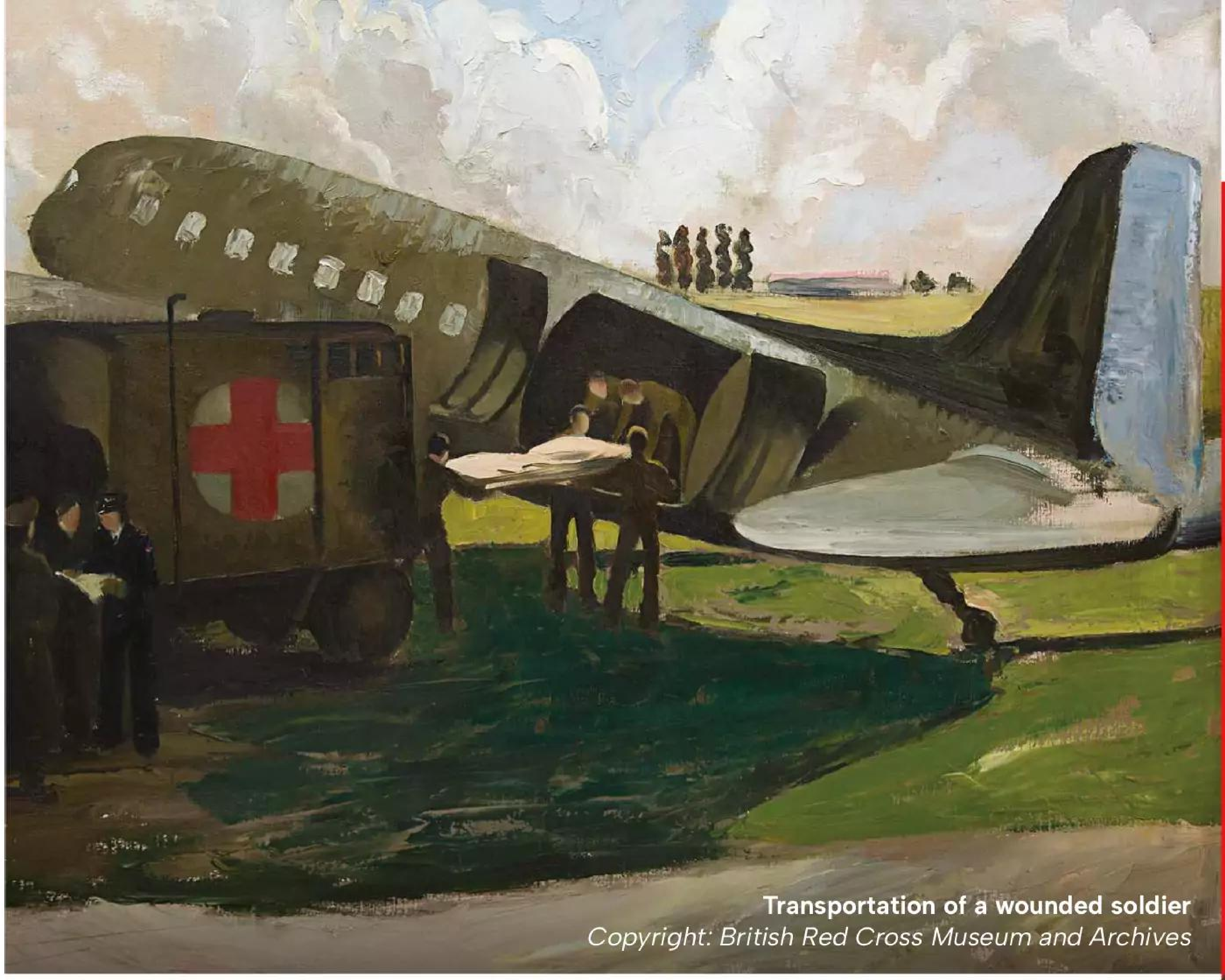
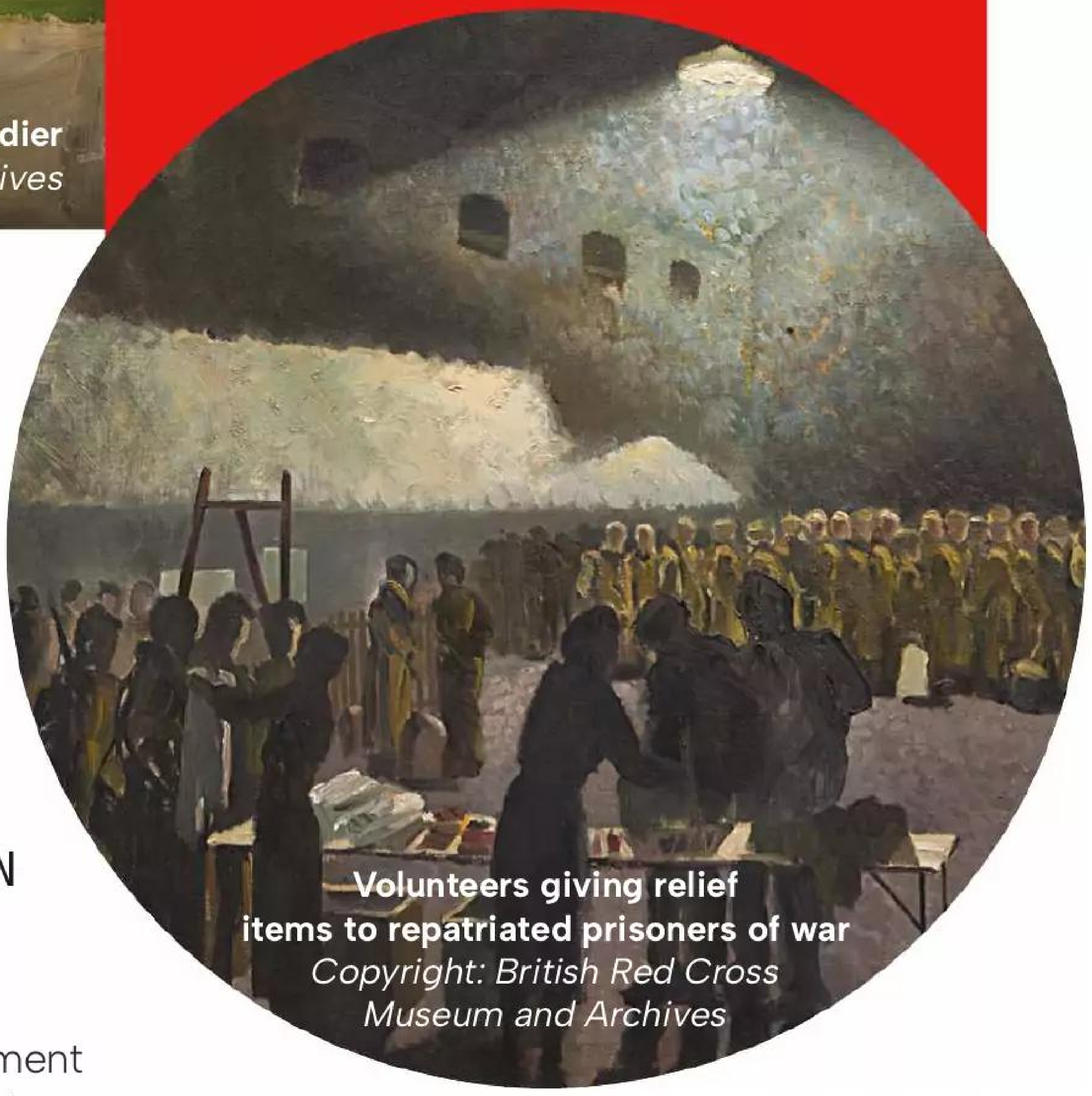


Transportation of a wounded soldier
Copyright: British Red Cross Museum and Archives

RED CROSS ART EXHIBITION
Bringing together art from the British Red Cross collection and other museums, this new exhibition explores the connection between art and humanitarianism. Along with celebrating Doris Zinkeisen's legacy, it also reflects on the charity's ongoing mission, *Here for Humanity*, providing aid to those in need. **Visit the free exhibition at the Oxo Gallery, Oxo Tower Wharf, Barge House St, London SE1 9PH. Open 8–11 May 2025.**

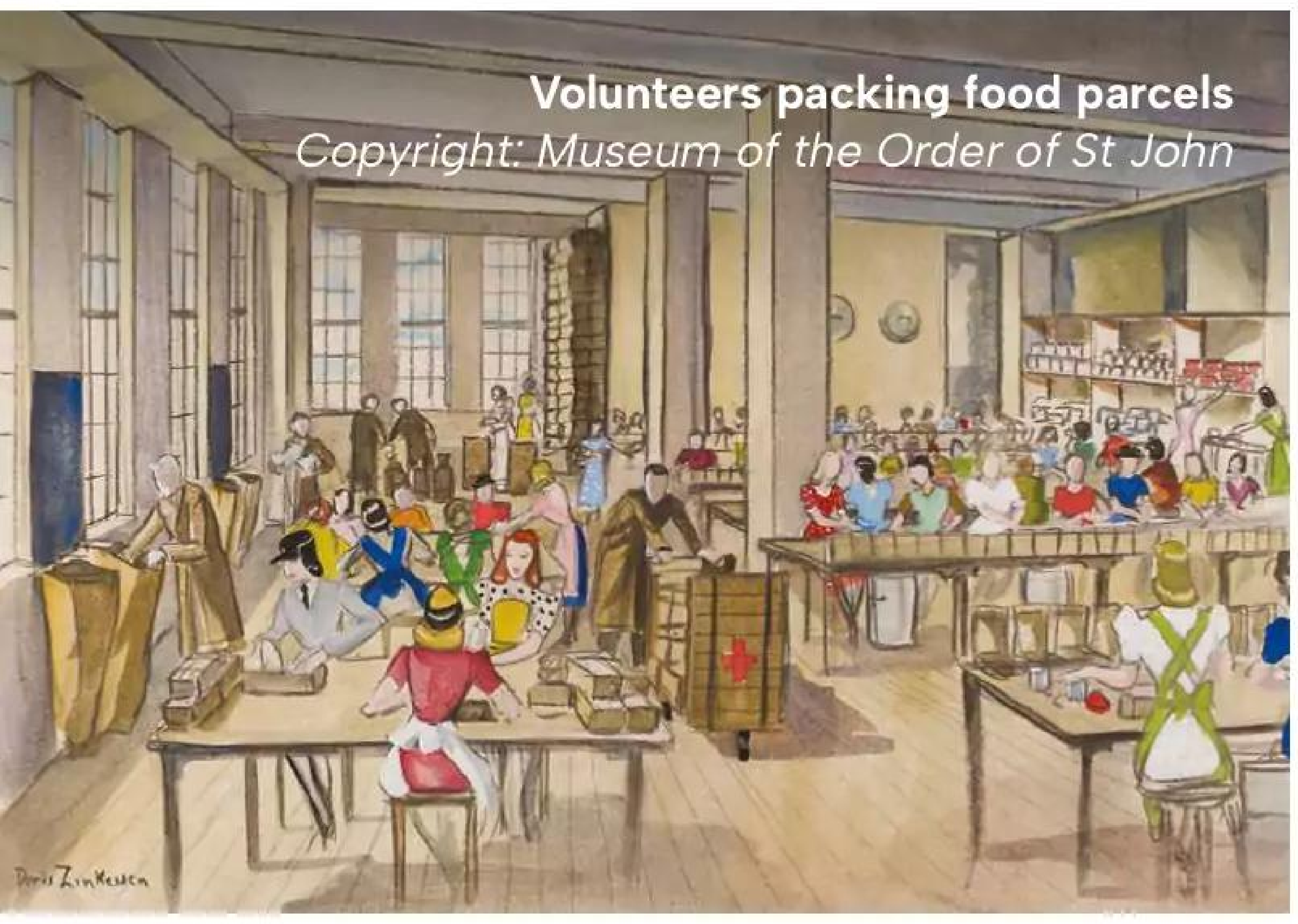
Brushstrokes from the Front Lines

IN CELEBRATION OF THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF VE DAY, BRITISH RED CROSS MUSEUM CURATOR, MEHZEBIN ADAM-SUTER, SHINES A LIGHT ON THE LIFE OF TRAILBLAZING ARTIST AND HUMANITARIAN DORIS ZINKEISEN



Volunteers giving relief items to repatriated prisoners of war
Copyright: British Red Cross Museum and Archives

Best known for her work in stage and costume design, painting and commercial art, Doris Clare Zinkeisen (1897–1991) and her sister Anna were among Britain's most influential artists from the 1920s to the 1950s. Yet beyond her artistic achievements, it was Zinkeisen's commitment to humanitarian work that truly set her apart.



Volunteers packing food parcels
Copyright: Museum of the Order of St John

During the First World War, she volunteered as a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse with the British Red Cross in Northwood, caring for soldiers injured on the front line. During the Second World War, she again served as a VAD nurse, treating air raid victims by day and painting the harsh realities of war by night, using disused operating theatres as makeshift studios.

ART IMITATING LIFE

At the end of the war in Europe in 1945, the War Organisation of the British Red Cross and the Order of St John commissioned Zinkeisen to capture post-war relief efforts overseas. Among her most compelling works is a series from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. As one of the first artists to enter the camp after its liberation, her paintings provided an unflinching visual record of its atrocities, offering an invaluable historical testimony.

Zinkeisen's artistic contributions were groundbreaking, offering a unique perspective at a time when war art was largely dominated by men. Her evocative works stand as a testament to the crucial role women played in documenting and interpreting war.

LEAVE A GIFT THAT'S NEVER FORGOTTEN

The work carried out by the British Red Cross is as essential today as it was during the Second World War. Thanks to the generosity of the charity's supporters, it can continue to be here for people, helping those in crisis, whoever and wherever they are. By including a gift in your will to the British Red Cross, you can be sure that, whatever happens in the future, the charity can be there when disaster strikes.

BritishRedCross

For more information about supporting the British Red Cross with a gift in your will and its free will writing offer, visit **redcross.org.uk/freewill** or call **0300 500 0401**

LETTERS

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Wartime memories

Kavita Puri's article on the importance of listening to the wartime stories of elderly relatives (*Hidden Histories*, March) struck a chord with me. My 95-year-old mother has vivid recollections of her experiences in the war, especially of her lucky escape when her home was destroyed by a V-1 'Doodlebug'. She and her mother managed to crawl out of the ruins covered in dust and ash. However, she insisted that this occurred in 1941, which I knew was impossible.

I had heard of the Bomb Census report, which documented every bomb that fell on the country during the Second World War, so I went to the National Archives in Kew to see it. It did not take much knowledge to narrow down the period I needed to search, and I was soon handed a huge bundle of flimsy pages. It took me a few hours to flick through them, and I was on the point of giving up, when there it was: a detailed report about the destruction of several houses, including my mother's home, in south-east London at 17.13 on 6 August 1944.

The thrill of validating my mum's memory and holding the very document written at the time was something I will never forget.

David Whale, via email

The aftermath of a V-1 bomb attack, August 1944. Reader David Whale set out to learn more about his mother's experience of WW2 bombing

RICHARD OVERY
RAIN OF RUIN
TOKYO, HIROSHIMA AND THE SURRENDER OF JAPAN

We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new book. This issue, that's **Rain of Ruin: Tokyo, Hiroshima and the Surrender of Japan** by Richard Overy. Read our review on page 74

Making nations

I enjoyed reading the interview with Lucy Noakes about the issues facing the funding and studying of history (*Conversation*, April). However, as I've noted before in these pages, when considering the benefits of studying history, people often focus on the transferable skills it gives students, rather than the actual value of understanding the past.

I think history, most of all, is about people. It gives us a sense of identity and belonging. Nations have developed through time to arrive at where they are now, and a person from a particular nation has usually been influenced by the history of that nation. This can be seen in the way they are, their behaviour, and their attitudes. Without overgeneralising, if you think of an American or a German, or most other nationalities, you tend to think of a certain type of person, because they have been influenced by their past and their culture.

All these things help shape our identity. We can think of a nation's history as an individual – the American, the German, and so on. To study the past is to study the person, and to study history is to study their story. And there is great value in that, too.

Bob Bass, Nuneaton

Grave omission

Your article on the identification of Richard III's remains (April) was interesting and informative. I would, however, have liked it to have included more about the part Philippa Langley played in their discovery. Without the unceasing conviction of her intuition, they might not have been uncovered at all.

Carol Hyams, Kent

Lines of the landscape

I very much enjoyed Max Adams's article on Anglo-Saxon Mercia (*The Forgotten Kingdom*, March). One of the finest things written about Mercia's history is Geoffrey Hill's 1971 prose poems *Mercian Hymns*. In the sequence, the poet praises King Offa's achievements, including "the historic rampart and ditch, the citadel at Tamworth" and "the summer heritage in Holy Cross". Hill writes about Mercian coinage ("Offa Rex resonant in silver"), the splendours of Opus Anglicanum tapestry, and much more, including Offa's brutality: "Swathed bodies in the long ditch; one eye upstaring / It is safe to presume, here, the king's anger."

Hill is concerned with what he calls Mercia's "processes of generation", its "tracks of occupation", up to the time of the Welsh Bridge, the Iron Bridge, and the construction of the M5. At the time of the poem's publication, the Staffordshire Hoard had not yet been discovered, but Hill always predicted such a treasure would one day be found. He redeems the Mercian landscape and history wonderfully, in a way which, for him, suggests not so much a lost kingdom as a found one, restored. It's a poem well worth reading.

Sam Milne, Surrey

Frozen in time

I was interested to learn about London's last frost fair (*Anniversaries*, February) with its 1814 winter carnival on the frozen Thames. I'm reading Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando*,

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PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF VE DAY
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SAVE WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TODAY
› Page 54

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LISTENING AREA
PLEASE RESPECT
THE MUSICIANS
THANK YOU

Musicians playing Irish folk music in a pub in Dublin. Reader Bob Bass suggests that it's vital to understand history because it's a key factor shaping national identity

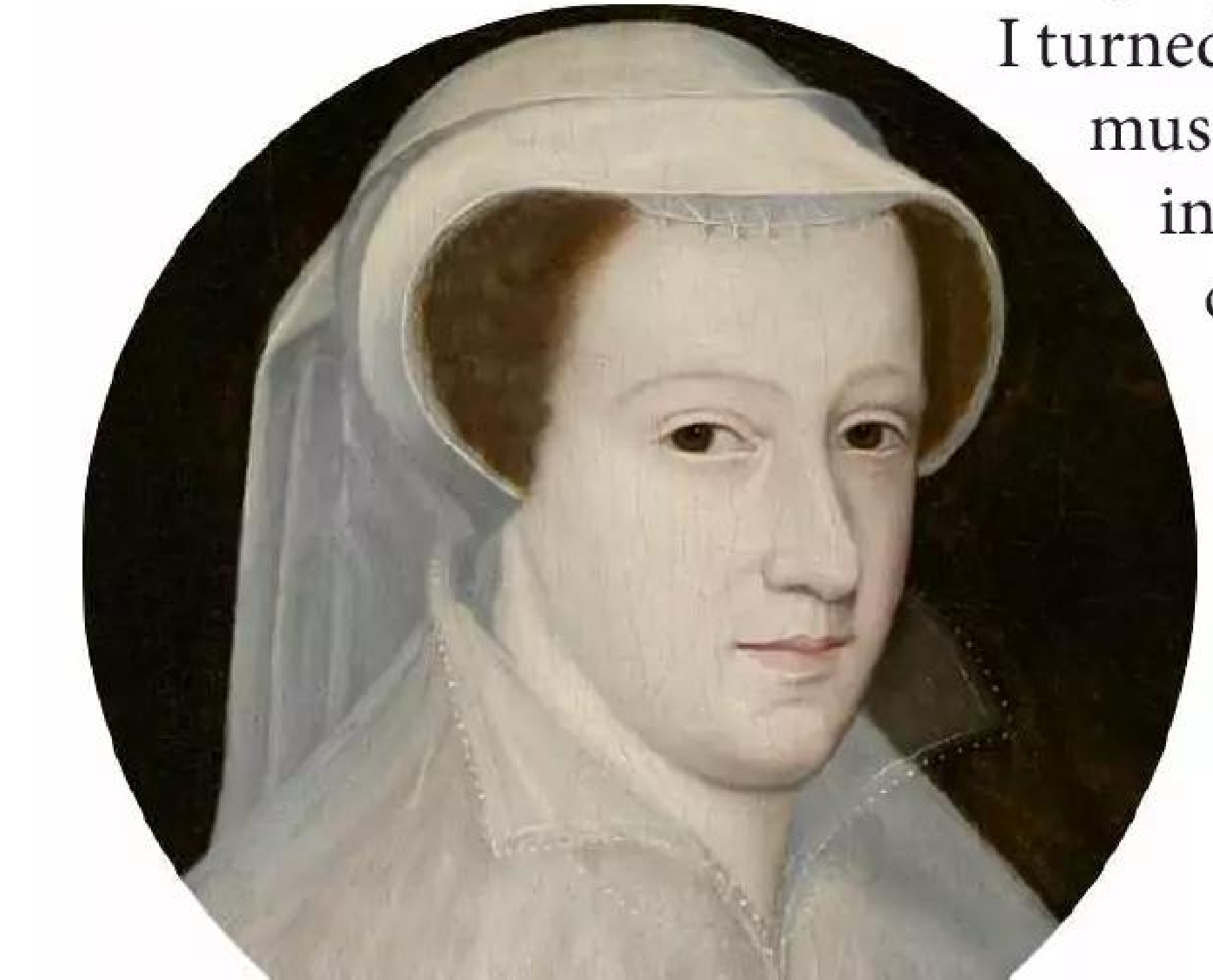
which features such a frost fair. It's referred to as "the Great Frost", which occurred early in the reign of James I, and Woolf describes it thus: "But while the country people suffered the extremity of want, and the trade of the country was at a standstill, London enjoyed a carnival of the utmost brilliancy… [The king] directed that the river, which was frozen to a depth of twenty feet and more for six or seven miles on either side, should be swept, decorated and given all semblance of a park or pleasure ground, with arbours, mazes, alleys, drinking booths, etc., at his expense."

It's always fun to read about events that give rise to things that happen in a novel.
Jim Heenehan, Pennsylvania

Captive queens

I liked Kate Williams' article about royal palace scandals (March), but would disagree that Anne Boleyn is the most famous of all imprisoned queens. That title must go to Mary, Queen of Scots – not least because she was an *actual* queen (not a consort), albeit not at the time of her execution. If a 'Queen Anne' was mentioned, it wouldn't be Boleyn who would spring to mind. I admit to being biased, being a Scotsman and a Stewart!
Graeme Stewart, Edinburgh

Mary, Queen of Scots as depicted in a c1560 portrait. Reader Graeme Stewart argues Mary's case as history's most famous imprisoned queen



Parting gifts

During my final read of the February issue, I turned to the *Q&A* about the first museum [likely established c530 BC in Ur, in what's now Iraq]. The clay cylinders used as labels are fascinating, but no translation was offered. Could it have been 'exit through the gift shop', perhaps?
Janet Mattacks, Essex

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

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Party time CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Revellers in Acton, London dance the conga as they mark VE Day; the community gathers for a street party in Netherfield, Nottinghamshire; a soldier and a young woman share a moment in a pub; jubilant crowds take to the streets in Manchester

“We sang, we danced and we all held hands”

IWM/TOPFOTO/ GETTY IMAGES

It’s 80 years since Britain erupted in joy at the news that the war in Europe was over. But how did those who lived through VE Day remember it? With the help of the BBC WW2 People’s War archive, **John Willis** reveals a day of partying, remembrance and continuing sacrifice

High spirits One of the most famous images of VE Day from Trafalgar Square (left) shows lifelong friends Cynthia Covello and Joyce Digney with two male companions; Churchill and members of the War Cabinet acknowledge the cheering crowds on Whitehall (above)

ALAMY/TOPFOTO

The long and brutal war in Europe was finally over. At 2.41am on 7 May 1945, Germany signed an unconditional surrender agreement at General Eisenhower's HQ in Reims, 80 miles north-east of Paris. Later that day, the BBC announced the news and the first celebrations began.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared the following day a national holiday, VE Day (Victory in Europe), and checked the supply of beer was large enough to satisfy the thirst of a happy nation. In Southampton, VE Day opened with a symphony of blaring ships' horns shortly after midnight. Later, beacons blazed, bunting fluttered in the afternoon sun and joyful parties echoed around every corner of Britain. Children tied effigies of Hitler to lampposts or burned the führer on bonfires.

At 3pm, Churchill broadcast from Downing Street: "My dear friends, this is your hour. This is not a victory for any party or class. It's a victory of the great British nation as a whole." But Churchill also reminded the partying millions that the conflict was not yet over. A fanatical, undefeated Japan still controlled swathes of territory in the far east.

In 2005, the BBC marked the 60th anniversary of VE Day by setting up a huge project called the WW2 People's War. With help from thousands of volunteers, charities, libraries and museums, the corporation collected an astonishing 47,000 testimonies, both from those who had been serving in the armed forces and from the home front. This was not history as seen from the lofty perspective of politicians or generals, diplomats or historians. Rather, the project gathered the memories of ordinary British men and women – a ground-floor history.

The WW2 People's War (and my book of the same name) stand as comprehensive accounts by those who fought, grieved, loved and survived through years of conflict – and how they reacted when the fighting in Europe was over. Most of the testimonies on the following pages are taken from this archive.

A riotous party

Unsurprisingly, many of those who gave interviews had vivid memories of VE Day itself. Frank Mee from Stockton-on-Tees, who was 16 in May 1945, clearly remembered the party: "I went off to a dance and it was riotous, flags draped around the hall and lights full on, everyone kissing everyone else. I drew the line at the hairy-faced sailors and stuck to the girls, making sure I went round several times. We sang, we danced, and we all held hands singing every song we could think of…

"We walked home feeling as if a huge cloud had lifted off our shoulders and I must admit I never once thought of the war in the far east still going on, as we sang and danced in the streets. Each time we met a group going the other way, we shared bottles and kissed all the girls. To a 16-year-old with raging hormones it was seventh heaven."

> " Everyone was kissing everyone else. **I drew the line at hairy-faced sailors and stuck to the girls** "

The scenes were similar in Glasgow. Tommy Mac was 14 and his testimony gives a sense of a topsy-turvy day when temporary connections gave rise to memories that lasted a lifetime: "She was an older girl, perhaps 16 or so. Still, she was to be my companion for the rest of the day. We made our way hand in hand from where we lived to find the main celebration in George Square… I didn't see many drunks, now I think on it. There was no need. The spirits were lifted high enough as it was. It was quite wonderful to see all the men and women in uniform hugging, kissing and generally flirting with the civilian population.

"During all this time, I never once let go of my companion's hand. I danced with her, hugged her, kissed her too. I don't know how many times. I never did find out what her second name was. All I knew was her name was Norah, my lovely Norah. In all my life I have never forgotten her, and although we were close to being as intimate as possible, there was never any impropriety. We stayed together until 4am when we finally kissed and said goodbye, each hugging the other. I never saw her again, and to this day I sometimes wonder whether Norah remembers as well. My lovely Norah, with you I shared the most memorable day of my life."

Eight-year-old Barbara Vanderstock's father had been away fighting for five years and by VE Day had still not returned home to Croydon. But his absence didn't stop his family from joining in with festivities: "Never mind, we were going to celebrate. Mum organised a massive bonfire in the garden and all our friends came. The flames were as high as the house. We all sang songs of victory – 'Roll out

Tuck in Residents of Brick Lane in London's East End hold a street party so that children can join in the celebrations of VE Day

The day after Princess Elizabeth famously left Buckingham Palace to join the crowds on VE Day. On 9 May, looking surprisingly chipper, she toured the East End

the Barrel', 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary' and 'We'll Meet Again', a song I later learnt from dad made soldiers in the western desert weep.

"Next, we went round to the street bonfire party where older boys carried lighted flames and marched in procession, ironically a sight reminiscent of the prewar Nazi rallies… There were flags, trestle tables, homemade paper hats, orange juice, jellies, and cakes and we sat there surrounded by laughing grown-ups who would give us anything we wanted."

But VE Day wasn't just about bonfires and dancing. It also heralded the renewal of simple pleasures, as if a forgotten world of sensations had suddenly been found again. Mary Burgess from Liverpool enjoyed a carefree walk with her nephew, who identified himself only as 'Tanker' in the archive. He recalled: "The striking aspect of it all was the banks of daffodils everywhere. It was as though the whole world was new, was young again – and clean."

They joined a queue for ice cream: "Never have I tasted ice cream so creamy, so sweet and so cold. And the texture was just right perfect! So, there we were: Mary and I walking along in the spring sunshine, licking ice creams down to the last milky drops, which we sucked noisily out of the cardboard corners, and happier than we had been in years. That was when the war ended for me and that was when there seemed to be a future."

Central London was the scene of the biggest celebrations. Thousands attended public thanksgiving services at St Paul's Cathedral. The royal family came out onto the Buckingham Palace balcony several times, waving to the joyful crowds. Princess Elizabeth, later Queen Elizabeth II, moved anonymously as a 19-year-old through the happy evening crowds in her Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) uniform. She later described it as "one of the most memorable nights of my life".

TOPFOTO/IWM/BRIDGEMAN

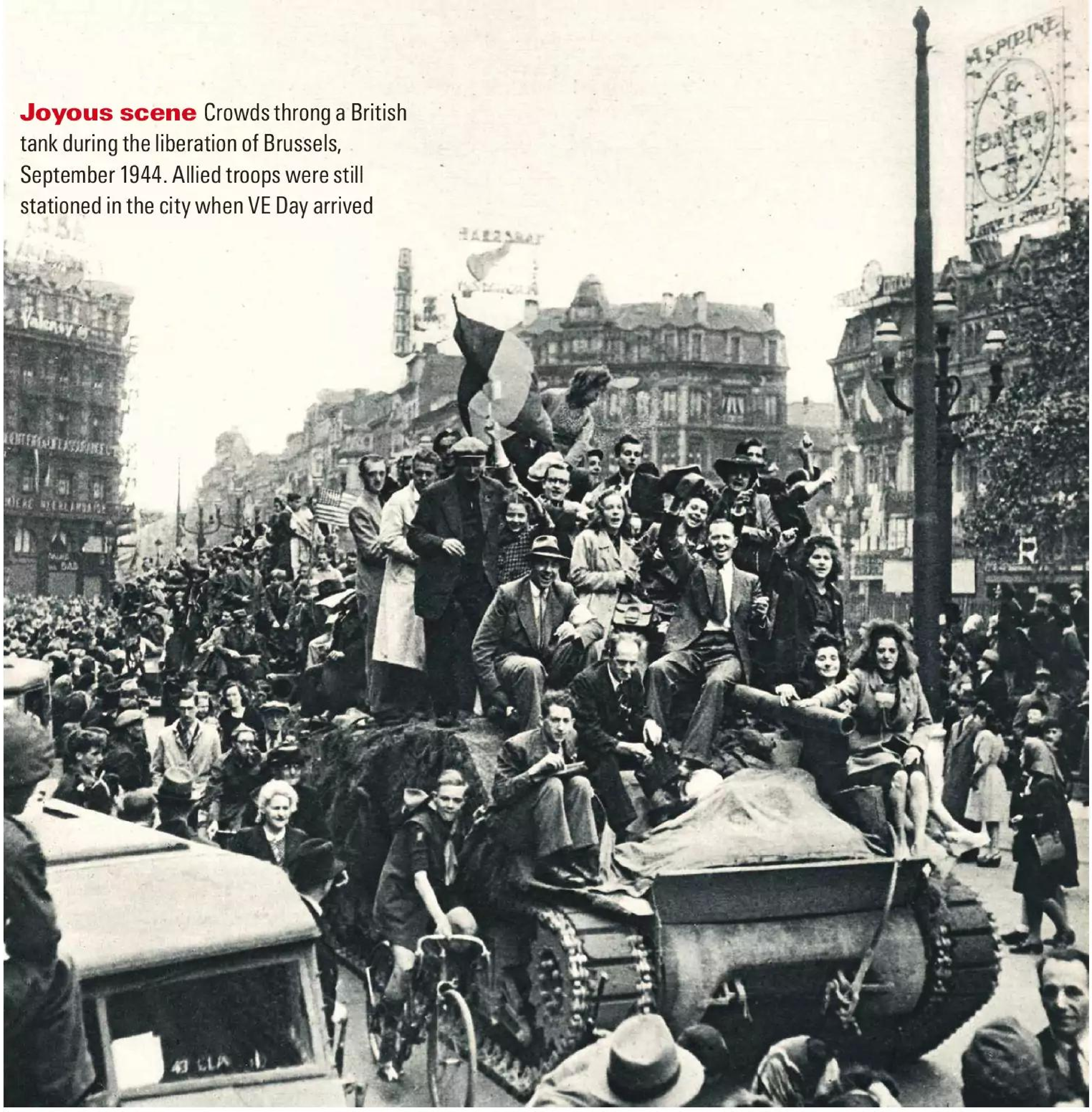
RAF navigator Ulric Cross, shown here on the day he received the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) and the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC)

"Everyone was overjoyed and I just didn't feel like taking part. A lot of my friends were killed"

The other foe

Not everyone could face VE Day's unrestrained jollity, especially those who had seen action. Ulric Cross, a Bomber Command navigator from Trinidad, was the most decorated West Indian in the RAF, nicknamed the Black Hornet. Cross fully intended to join the celebrations in London but, on witnessing the joyful crowds, he headed home. Having seen so many friends killed, he felt too uncomfortable to celebrate: "Everybody was overjoyed and I just didn't feel like taking part in it. I just felt a lot of people had been killed. This was not a cause for celebration… A lot of my friends were killed… [But] I was extremely glad the war was over."

Or at least almost over. As Churchill had been careful to mention on 8 May, the Allies still faced "another foe". This was abundantly clear to Odell Johnson of the US 453rd Bomb Group, which was assigned to fight the Japanese as the war in Europe wound down, but first had to return to the USA for training. On VE Day itself, as his troop train pulled past tenement buildings into London, Johnson



Joyous scene Crowds throng a British tank during the liberation of Brussels, September 1944. Allied troops were still stationed in the city when VE Day arrived

Let the light in St Paul's Cathedral was illuminated as part of the celebrations on VE Day

witnessed a sight that made him laugh: "On the fourth or fifth floor, stood this elderly woman on the fire escape… In her hands she had a pair of red, white and blue bloomers."

Johnson was astonished at the size of the patriotic knickers: "[They] would have fitted the biggest elephant you ever saw. She stood there, waving at us Yanks going home on VE Day and wishing us well."

As Johnson was shipped out of the UK via Southampton, Ted Stocker was busy flying in the opposite direction, repatriating British prisoners from German camps. "We had the privilege of flying back over England on the evening of VE Day when all the bonfires were lit. It was a magnificent sight!… I did get a drink sometime early on the morning of the ninth as the girls in the telephone exchange found a bottle of gin that had something left in the bottom. I had a very tiny tot of gin. That was my VE Day."

Far from home

If George's VE Day pleasures were limited, he did at least make it back to Blighty. In contrast, thousands of British troops were miles away from the celebrations in the UK, maintaining order in Germany and countries the Nazis had occupied. WAAF Mary Pettit, for example, was stationed in Brussels: "What a sight! The whole city was lit up by searchlights, rockets, flares, Very lights [flares] everywhere. British, Belgian and American flags were flying, crowds were in the streets singing and laughing, car horns were sounding. As the evening sky darkened, the famous buildings were silhouetted against the glow from bonfires and fireworks. The old trams were clanking along as usual, but now with people standing or dancing on their roofs."

Mohammed Hussain was an Indian machine gunner stationed in Austria. When the soldiers learnt of Germany's surrender: "There was a spontaneous eruption of joy. Within a few minutes the entire atmosphere had transformed from one of death to one of a potential new life."

Nineteen-year-old actor Beryl Andrews was touring Germany in an ENSA (Entertainments National Service Association) production. Her words similarly capture a sense of emotions being released. On VE Day, she was entertaining British troops at Emsdetten, North-Rhine Westphalia, Germany: "During the show someone came in at the back and called out, 'The war is over!' With one accord the whole audience rose to its feet and cheered madly, it was wonderful. I don't know how we finished the show, we felt choked with emotion. I shall never forget hearing during the interval hundreds of happy voices singing, 'Take Me Back to Dear Old Blighty'."

> **" I shall never forget hearing hundreds of happy voices singing 'Take Me Back to Dear Old Blighty' "**

Starting a fire

Some, though, had to be on duty. Flight Lieutenant Albert Ricketts was also stationed in Germany. His whole base was stood down for VE Day, except Albert, who was ordered to fly to Canadian Army HQ to pick up a senior officer, Major-General Gerald Templer: "[He] greeted me with the words, 'We must be the only silly buggers working today.'"

That evening, in the absence of fireworks, Albert and his colleagues fired a Very pistol, or flare gun, instead. "The person using the pistol fired one cartridge straight up into the air and the wind carried the burning cartridge onto one of our aircraft setting it on fire, so it was completely wrecked. Somehow or other we managed to cover up this unfortunate accident."

Ron Goldstein of the 4th Queen's Own Hussars had served in north Africa and Italy. The long battle against the Germans up through Italy was brutal and the campaign did not end until 2 May 1945, just six days before VE Day. Ron spent the day itself on duty near Venice: "There we were in this field in the middle of nowhere, when someone on another tank called out, 'They're going mad

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

When the guns fell silent in Europe
To view a gallery of images of the VE Day celebrations across Britain and beyond, go to *historyextra.com/ve-day-gallery*

back home, get the BBC on your set or you'll miss all the fun!' I turned my set to the Forces station and, for the benefit of those outside the tank, hung all the earphones over the side of the hull. The crackle of the headphones soon drew a small crowd around the tank and we all listened in amazement to an unknown announcer describing the scenes in Trafalgar Square.

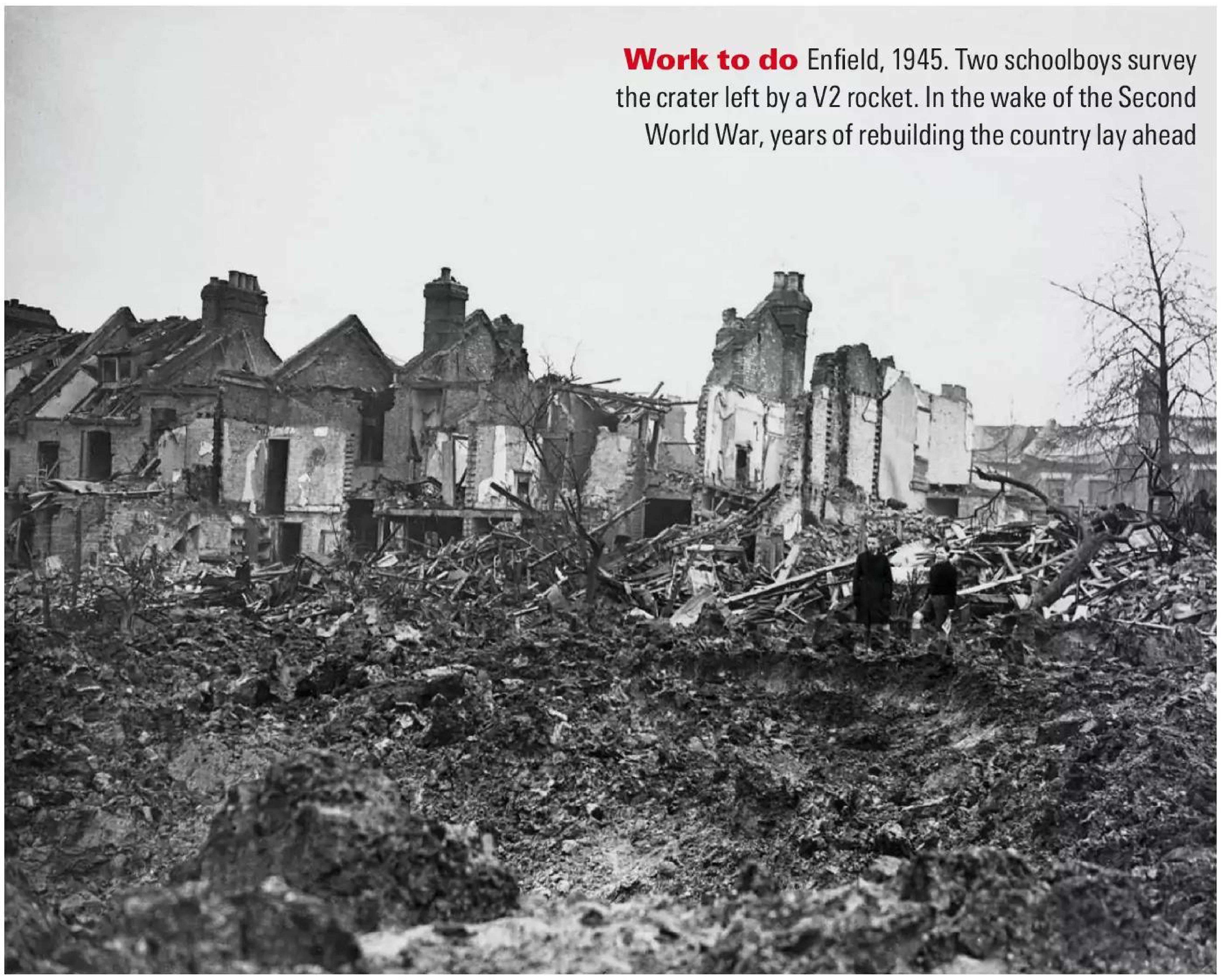
"I remember quite clearly that my emotions at the time were mixed. On one hand it was good to feel that perhaps some of my loved ones back home were taking part in these scenes. On the other hand, I – and in hindsight I'm sure most of my comrades – felt somehow cheated that we, who had risked life and limb and had been away from home for so many years, were not there in England to share in the triumph."

A few days later, Goldstein received bad news that could only have compounded his sense of ambivalence: "I received a letter to say that my brother, Jack, had been shot down over Germany and had been posted as missing. It reached me within a week of the war ending in Europe."

While on VE Day itself, anxiety for the future was largely buried beneath the exuberant partying, Ron Goldstein's memories offer a sharp reminder of how contingent the future still seemed – and was. In the domestic arena, for instance, many returning from service abroad wondered if their partners had found new love. And for those waiting at home, would their partners be the same after witnessing so much horror on the battlefield or in a prison or internment camp?

A quote from Birmingham resident Eunice Edwards captures the uncertainty: "Everybody longed for the end of the war, to come home and get back to normal. Alas, no one could go back to 1939. Everything had changed. Some people had married and wanted new houses; some had lost loved ones and couldn't rejoice. Some people got married after long separations and others got divorced as soon as they could. Some girls had married soldiers from America and Canada and went away to start new lives. It was a case of new beginnings for all of us."

Even for those not facing personal upheavals, there was a sense of needing to begin anew, as reflected in the reflective words of Kathleen Godrey, who was based at Bletchley Park and served with the WAAF: "Now it seems hard to imagine or even remember the shabbiness of our lives… No houses had been painted for years, no trees planted, no roads repaired. In cities where the parks should have been protected by elegant railings, there was either barbed wire or nothing at all. The railings and even


Work to do Enfield, 1945. Two schoolboys survey the crater left by a V2 rocket. In the wake of the Second World War, years of rebuilding the country lay ahead

Italian job
ABOVE: Troops and tanks of Britain's 8th Army in Italy, 1945. Ron Goldstein (inset) listened in from just outside Venice as a BBC announcer described the scenes in Trafalgar Square on 8 May

> **Alas, no one could go back to 1939. Everything had changed. It was a case of new beginnings**

GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO

Prison camp life More than 130,000 Allied civilians, including women and children, were interned in camps like this in the far east during the war. Over 14,000 of these prisoners didn't survive the experience

saucepans had gone to win the war and in London most buildings which had been bombed were still standing in ruins. We all had to start a new life."

Conflict continued

Some had to wait longer than others for a fresh start. On 8 May 1945, Enola Gay, the B-29 from which an atomic bomb would be dropped on Hiroshima in August, had yet to even enter service. In the far east, the fighting was still intense and thousands of British citizens were incarcerated in Japanese camps on VE Day. Cut off from the outside world, they had no idea the war in Europe was over.

As Britain celebrated VE Day, Sergeant Len Baynes from Cambridgeshire was a prisoner of war in Thailand, who had been set to work repairing the infamous Burma Railway of *Bridge on the River Kwai* fame – a track that 12,000 Allied prisoners had died building. When a train transporting wounded Japanese soldiers pulled into a station, Baynes felt sympathy for the enemy: "Nearly every truck contained several dead. Many had terrible wounds, undressed and covered in flies. Others had amputations only covered in field dressings… Our men, their prisoners, walked the length of the train lifting those out who could stand, and filling mess tins and water bottles for others."

When he finally returned home aged 23, Len's family scarcely recognised him: "I left home a fresh-faced young man and now I looked [to them] like an old man."

In her internment camp for women and children, deep in Sumatra's interior, British nurse Phyllis Briggs also knew nothing about events in Europe. It was not until 24 August 1945, nine days after Japan had surrendered, that her guards told Briggs the war was over in both Europe and the far east. She had been interned for more than three years.

Taken prisoner A British soldier searches captured Japanese fighters in 1945. The conflict in Asia didn't end until August, when PoWs such as Len Baynes could finally come home

In the final months of conflict, the number of women dying in Briggs' camp rapidly increased: "The coffins were very rough boxes made of boards that did not even join together properly. We used to cover the coffin tops with ferns to make them look more decent and fill the gaps… I shall always connect ferns with dear friends who had gone. Miss Dryburgh, Nan Wier, Miss Livingstone, Mary Cooper, Macfie – all real friends dying one after another. Several Dutch nuns and Australian sisters died – always one or two deaths every day. The gravediggers found it difficult to dig deep enough, it took so much strength. In the end, it was the children who were the strongest and it was they who did the digging." From an original group of 15 female internees, only five survived Japanese imprisonment.

New world order

For Phyllis Briggs and thousands like her, life after the war would never be the same again. Britain partied hard on VE Day, yet once the trestle tables were folded away and the bonfires burnt out, families across the nation – and in the various war zones across the globe – were confronted with the task of coming to terms with loss and dislocation in their lives. Soon they would vote out Winston Churchill, who had inspired Britons through even the darkest days of the war, and replace him as prime minister with Labour leader Clement Attlee. A new world beckoned.

In Croydon, eight-year-old Barbara Vanderstock's father had missed spending VE Day with his family, but he eventually returned home to fresh beginnings: "We went to town on the decorations, crowning our efforts with a large poster, 'Welcome Home Dad'… We went to sleep and we were woken up by dad, who was in his army uniform standing at the door. He said: 'Hello Erbs', and we said: 'Hello dad.' It was a strangely ordinary moment."

> **"In the end, it was the children who were the strongest and it was they who dug the graves"**

John Willis is a historian and former TV executive. His latest book, *The People's War: Unheard Voices*, is out now (BBC Books)

An archived version of the BBC's **WW2 People's War** project can be found at: *bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar*

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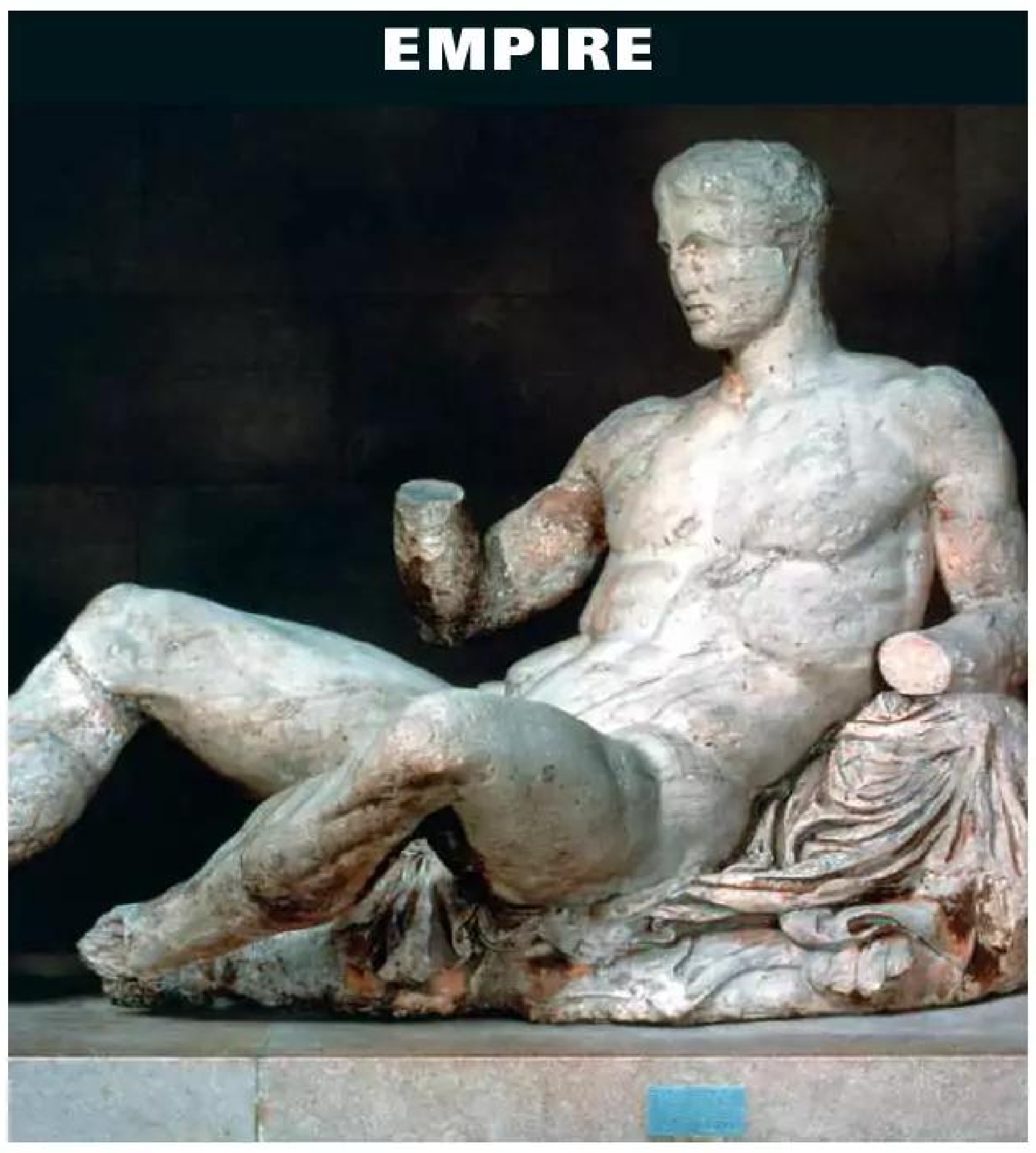
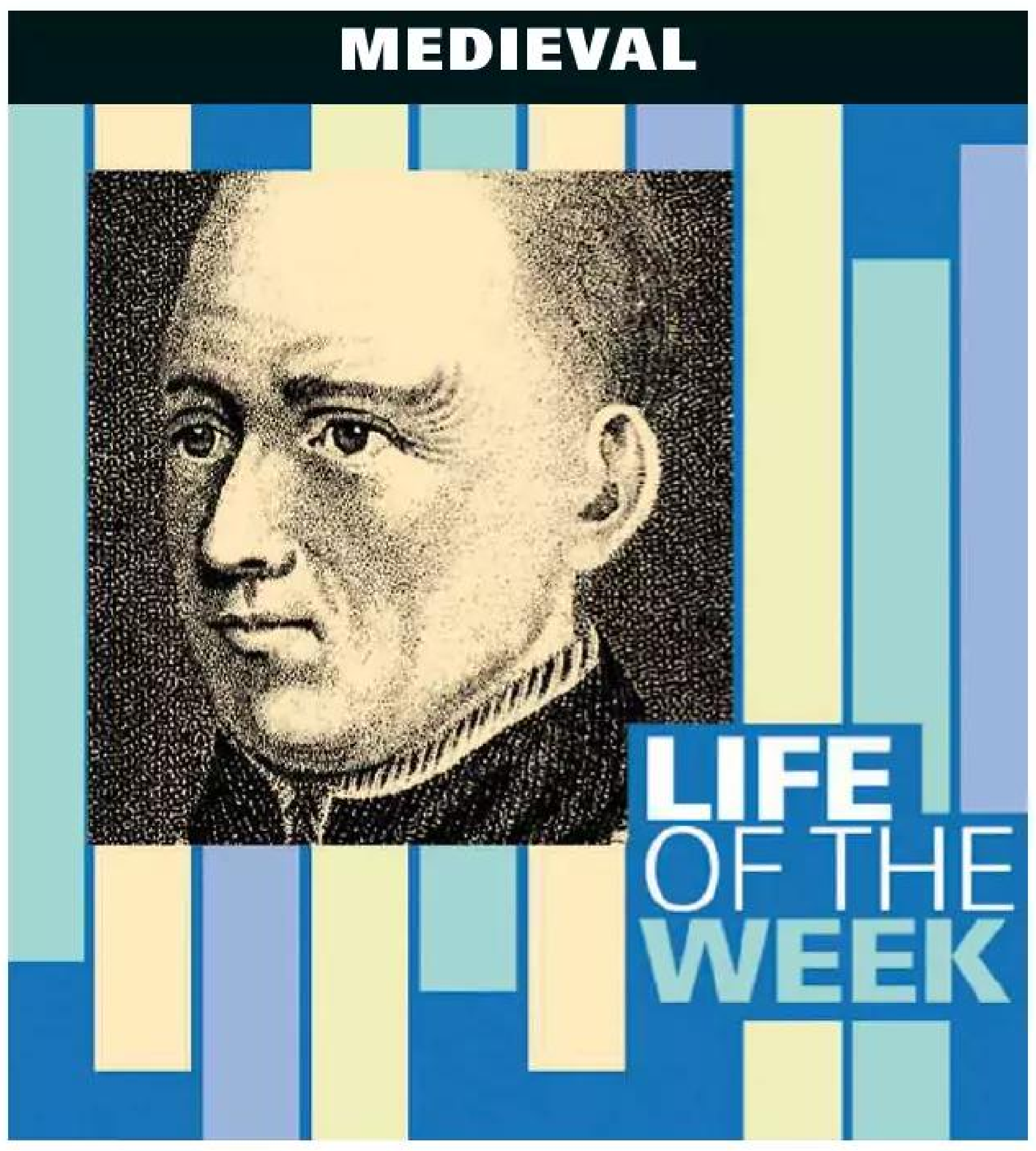


Places of plunder?

Should we stop treating museums as colonial crime scenes? Historian **Justin M Jacobs** explains why he believes that calls for artefacts to be repatriated to their countries of origin often overlook the wishes of the people who made them in the first place.

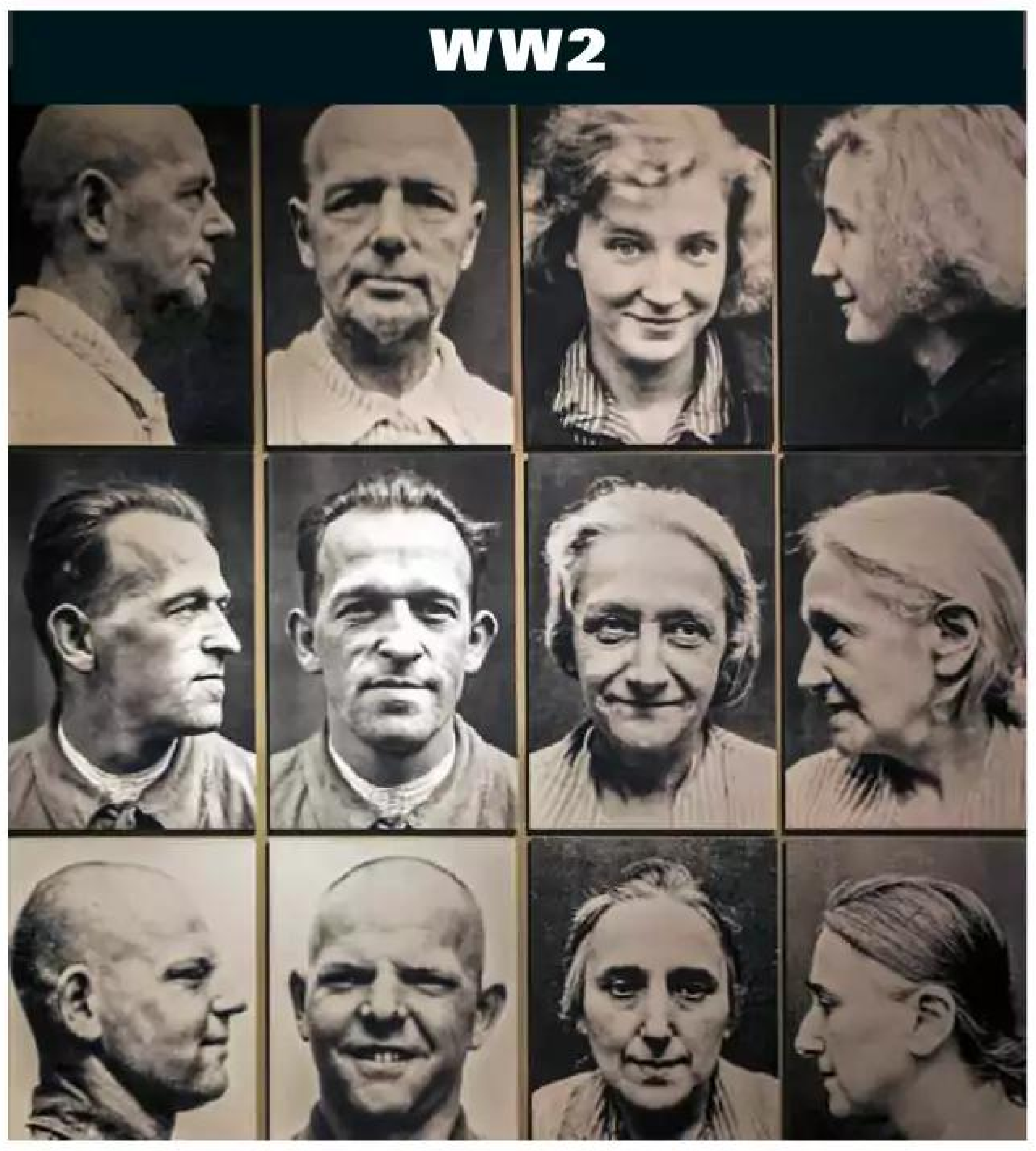
MEDIEVAL



Making a martyr

Thomas Becket is best known for his bloody death in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170. But what about the life that led him there? **Michael Staunton** reveals how the archbishop rose from humble origins to become the thorn in Henry II's side.

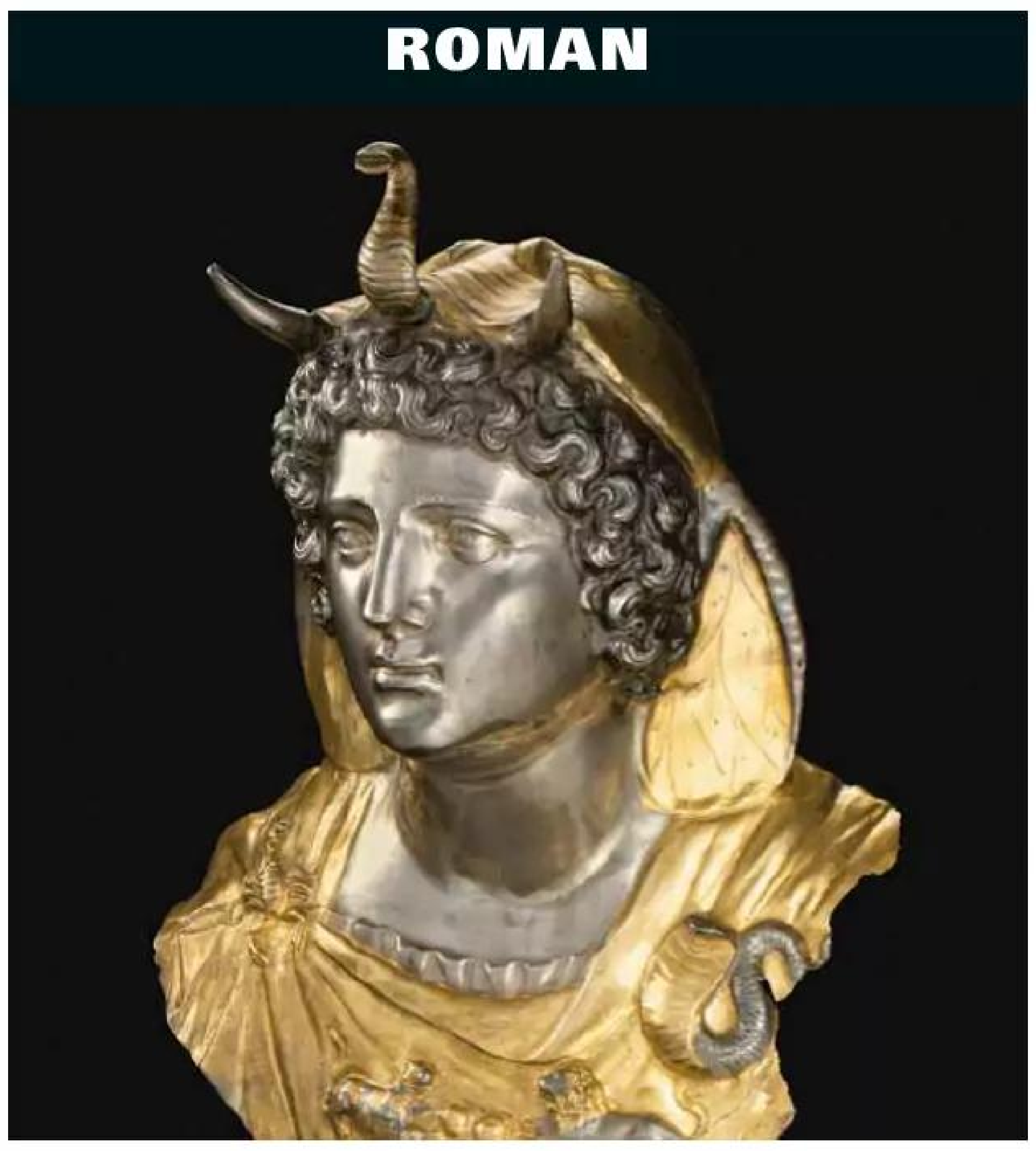
WW2



Story of a genocide

Between 1939 and 1945, the Nazis killed nearly 300,000 people with psychiatric illnesses or cognitive disabilities. Some 400,000 more were forcibly sterilised. **Dagmar Herzog** discusses the dark ideologies that drove this mass murder.

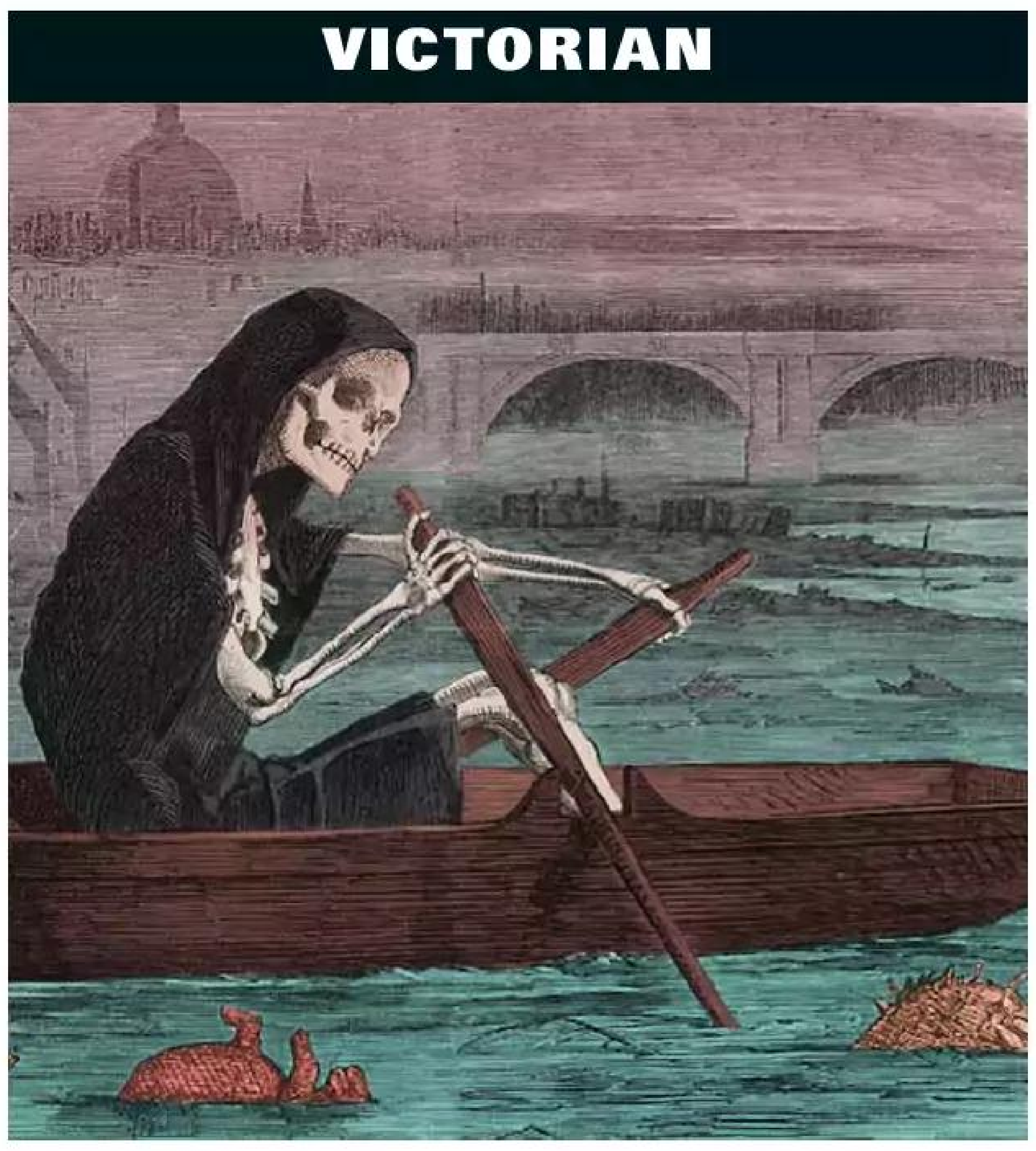
ROMAN



Rome's rule-breaker

She super-charged Mark Antony's rise to power, whipped up gang violence, went to war with Octavian – and may (just may) have abused Cicero's decapitated head with a hair pin. **Jane Draycott** separates fact from fiction in the story of Fulvia – one of Rome's most fascinating women.

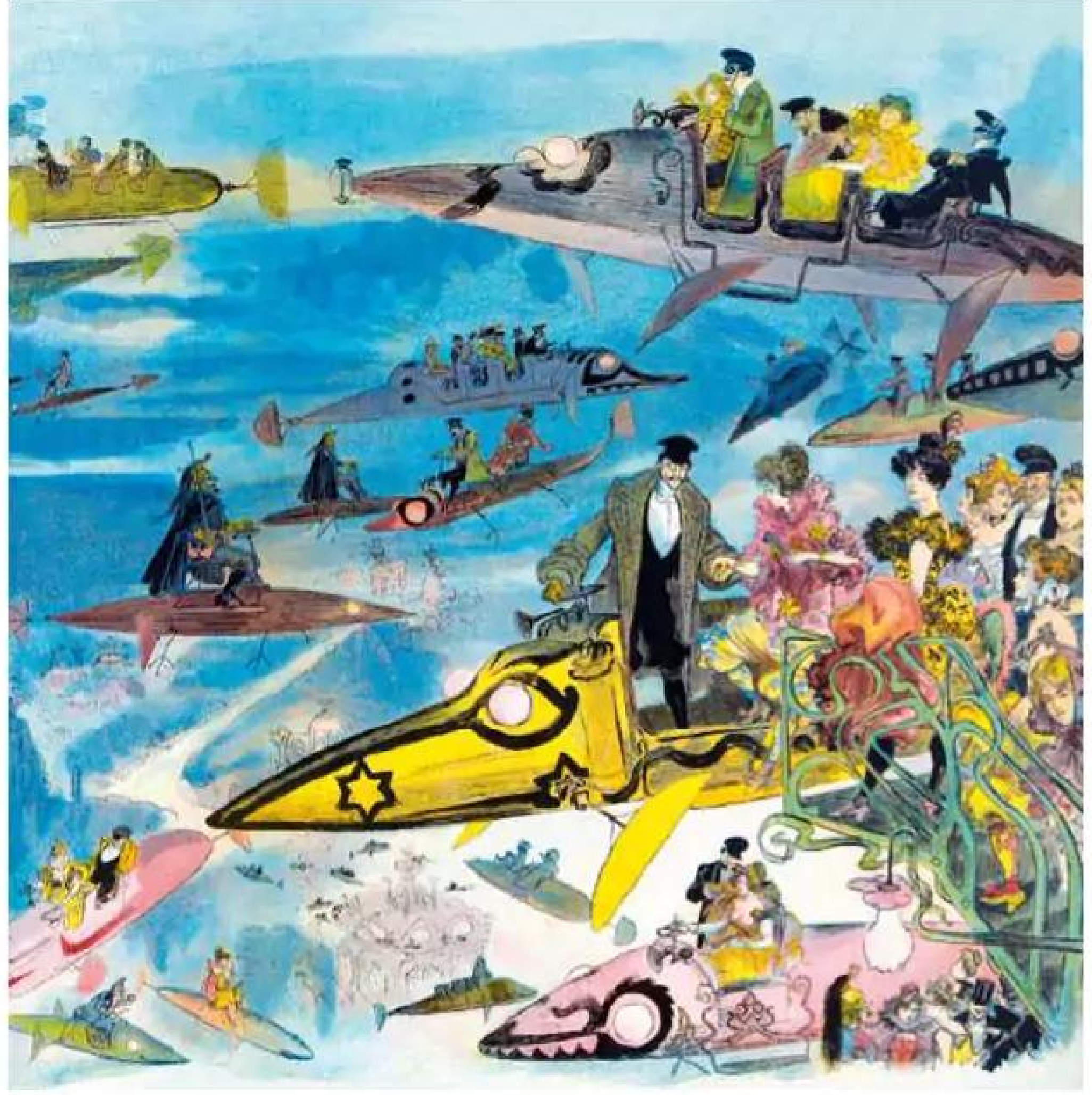
VICTORIAN



A real stinker

In the 1850s, the Thames was essentially an open sewer, carrying excrement through the capital. It's little wonder, then, that the city became afflicted with a stench so bad that the government had to step in. **Rosemary Ashton** reveals how they tackled the offensive odour.

BIOGRAPHY



Bright spark

Was Nikola Tesla an early proponent of 'tech bro' culture? How would he feel about Elon Musk using his name to sell electric cars? And did he really invent a type of 'death ray'? **Iwan Morus** revisits the extraordinary life and career of this Serbian-American pioneer of electrical energy.

GETTY IMAGES

SCOTLAND'S
SEASO
OF

In 16th and 17th-century Scotland, many hundreds of 'witches' were put to death – 10 times the proportion executed in England. **Martha McGill** asks what drove the killings

ON THE WITCH

DREAMSTIME

In November 1590, a servant named Geillis Duncan from East Lothian was interrogated by her employer, David Seton. According to *Newes from Scotland*, a 1591 pamphlet that included a report of the case, Geillis used to sneak out of her master's house at night. She also "took in hand to help all such as were troubled or grieved with any kind of sickness or infirmity" and performed "many matters most miraculous".

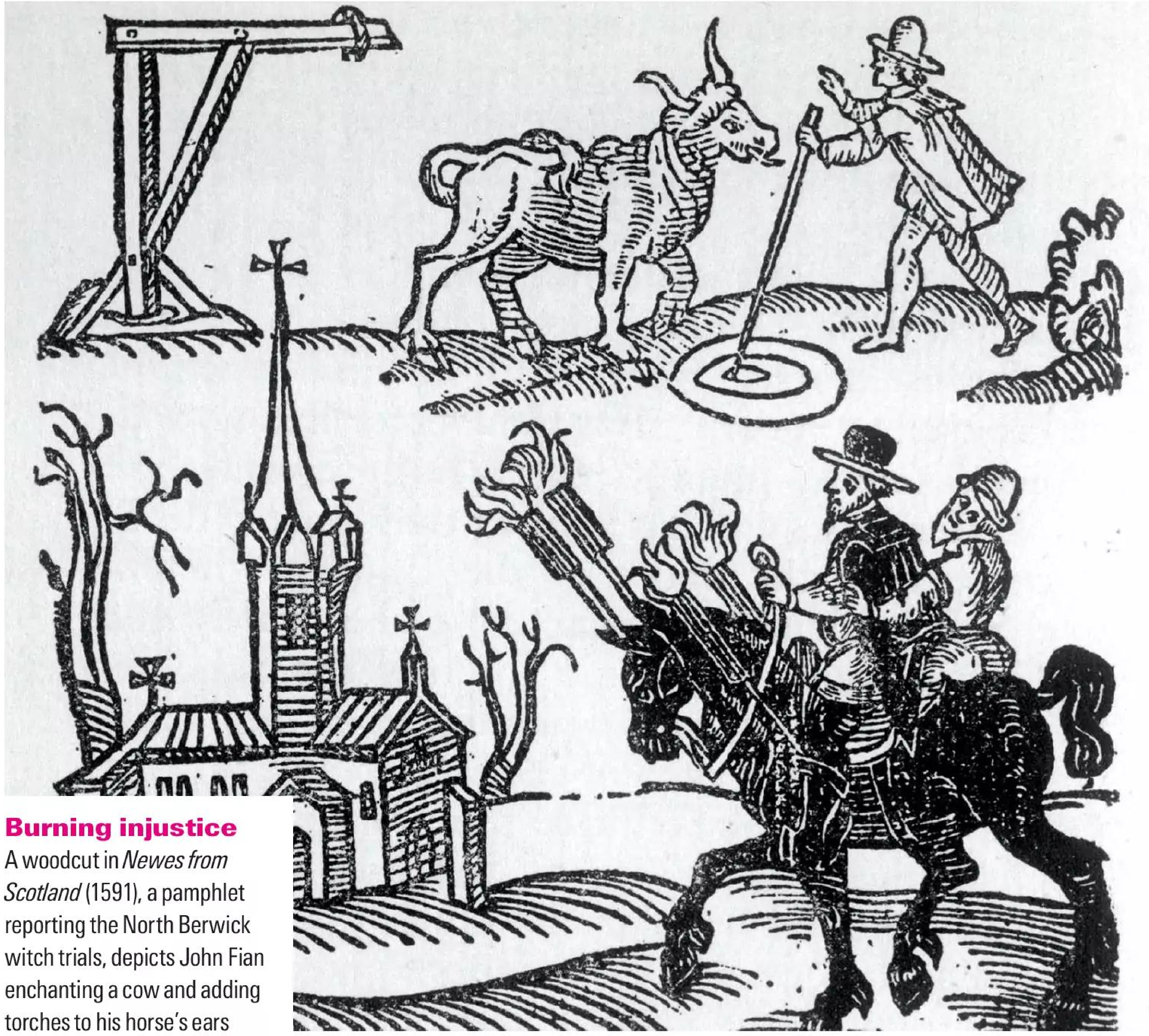
Suspicions aroused, Seton questioned Duncan about how she worked her cures. When she gave no answer, he tortured her with thumbscrews and by "binding or wrenching her head with a cord or rope". Still she remained silent. Finally, Seton and others searched her for a 'devil's mark' – a blemish or insensitive spot created by Satan – and found one on her throat. She broke down and confessed "that all her doings were done by the wicked allurements and enticements of the devil, and that she did them by witchcraft".

Witchcraft had been criminalised in 1563, and there had been a handful of prosecutions since. But Duncan's confession kicked off something new – Scotland's first large-scale witch-hunt. What's striking about this panic over supposed black magic is just how much more intense and lethal it was than witch-hunting in other European countries – perhaps most notably England.

Following her interrogation (involving torture), Geillis Duncan claimed to have participated in a night-time witches' gathering, also known as a sabbat, at North Berwick kirk. She alleged that other locals were present, and as many as 70 people were ultimately accused. Their confessions detailed bizarre and alarming practices. Supposedly they had sailed across the sea in sieves, meeting at the kirk to dance and sing. The devil had preached from the pulpit, and they had kissed his buttocks. Some of the accused also claimed to have attacked King James VI, casting spells to harm him or raising storms to sink his ships.

Newes from Scotland reported that the devil considered James VI "the greatest enemy he hath in the world" – a statement designed to flatter a monarch who believed himself divinely appointed. But James was also fearful of the devil's designs on him, and involved himself directly in the interrogation of the accused witches. Blame began to make its way up the social scale, and the king's own cousin, the Earl of Bothwell, was accused of heading a conspiracy against the monarch. Although he was eventually acquitted, Bothwell's political career was ruined, and he was forced into exile.

The last executions resulting from the North Berwick trials were in 1592, but the



Burning injustice
A woodcut in *Newes from Scotland* (1591), a pamphlet reporting the North Berwick witch trials, depicts John Fian enchanting a cow and adding torches to his horse's ears

fallout from the witch-hunt endured far longer. The idea of the threat of witchcraft had been promulgated from the highest social echelons, and was further publicised in 1597 when James VI published *Daemonologie*, a book about the devil's wiles.

Mass witch-hunts swept Scotland again in 1628–30, 1649 and 1661–62. The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, a database recording known prosecutions, has identified 3,837 accused. Execution rates are difficult to establish but may have been in the region of two-thirds. By these metrics, Scotland's execution rate per head of population may have been about five times the European average, and 10 times that in England.

Who were the 'witches'?

Those accused of witchcraft were usually of middle age or older. Though rarely wealthy, they were not typically destitute. People from society's middling ranks had the strongest economic ties to their neighbours, and were most likely to become embroiled in quarrels. Sometimes local healers or cunning folk were targeted, but most of the accused were not magical practitioners of any kind.

Men were sometimes prosecuted for witchcraft. One of the victims of the North Berwick trials was a Haddington schoolmaster called John Fian. According to *Newes from Scotland* – the primary focus of which was Fian's case – he confessed under torture to having served as the devil's clerk at witches' meetings. Other crimes ascribed to him by *Newes from Scotland* and the trial transcript included throwing cats into the sea to raise storms and magically lighting up a horse's ears while travelling by night.

Perhaps the oddest story told how Fian became obsessed with the sister of one of his pupils. When she rejected his attentions, he asked the boy to bring him three of the girl's pubic hairs, promising in return to refrain from beating him in the classroom. The boy's attempt to take the hairs awoke his sister, who complained to their mother. After a sound beating, the boy confessed the scheme. His crafty mother substituted the desired pubic hairs with three strands from a cow. When Fian eagerly brewed up a love spell, the cow reportedly came barging in, "leaping and dancing upon him, and following him forth… to what place so ever he went".

Fian was something of an outlier: about 85 per cent of those convicted of witchcraft in Scotland were female. Women were more likely to work in domestic spaces and to be blamed for domestic misfortunes. Misogyny was another factor. In the late 17th century, lecturers at Aberdeen University taught that women were more susceptible to demons because they "believe more easily, discern less, and are more driven by desires for revenge and pleasure". Men who became witches, the lecturers added, were "often effeminate, timid, credulous, fickle, and disturbed in judgment like women".

One interrogation method was witch-pricking, in which the accused was searched and pricked to find a 'devil's mark'

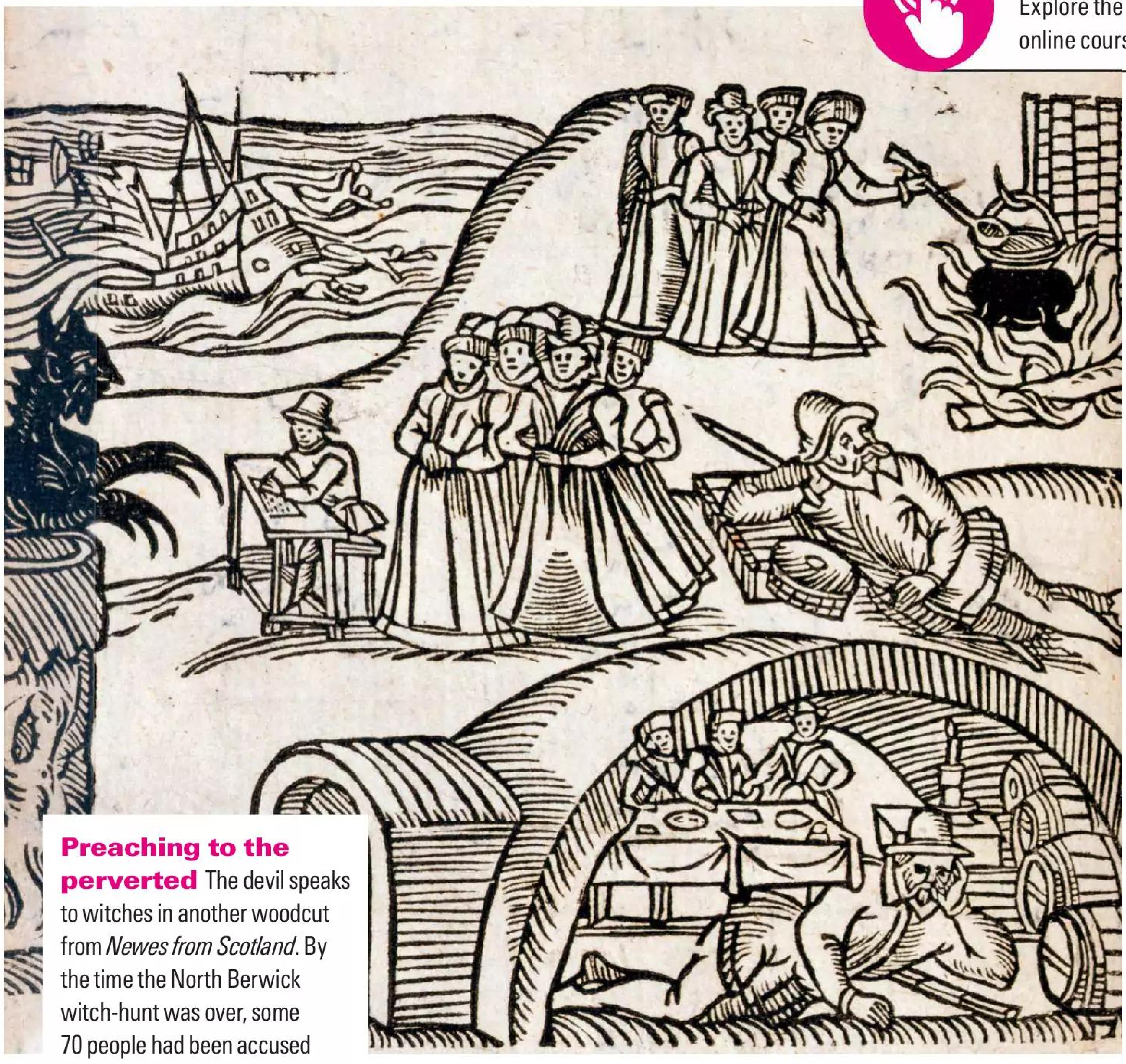
The Scottish kirk was also a patriarchal institution. The Calvinist leader John Knox, who was probably involved in drafting the 1563 act that made witchcraft a capital offence, did have circles of female confidants. Yet he is better remembered for *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), in which he asserted that women were "weak, frail, impatient, feeble and foolish". But Scotland was not any more misogynistic than other parts of Europe; indeed, women actually made up a higher proportion of those accused in England. Misogyny can't explain the relative severity of witch-hunting north of the border.

Capital punishment

Legal frameworks provide a crucial starting point for understanding the differences between witch-hunting in England and Scotland. England's 1563 and 1604 witchcraft acts prescribed different penalties according to the severity of the offence. By the terms of the Scottish act, any use of "witchcraft, sorcery and necromancy" was punishable by death. So, too, was consulting witches, though this was not enforced. Some convicted

ALAMY/DREAMSTIME

Demonology and demonisation
Explore the history of witchcraft with our HistoryExtra Academy online course at *historyextra.com/academy/witchcraft-course*



Preaching to the perverted The devil speaks to witches in another woodcut from *Newes from Scotland*. By the time the North Berwick witch-hunt was over, some 70 people had been accused

witches were given other sentences, such as banishment, but Scottish punishments remained harsher than those typically meted out south of the border.

In addition, Scottish interrogators made more use of torture to extract confessions. This practice was illegal unless authorised by a warrant from the privy council, the main executive governmental body, but zealous ministers and lairds sometimes overlooked that prohibition. Physical torture of the kind used against Geillis Duncan seems to have been relatively uncommon, but sleep deprivation was probably widely employed.

Another coercive interrogation method was witch-pricking, by which the accused was searched and pricked with pins to find a 'devil's mark'. Martha Semple (or Sempell), a "well-favoured and genteel" girl of 17 or 18 from Renfrewshire, was investigated for witchcraft in 1697. According to one record, she was twice searched for the devil's mark, and "the pricker missed not to search the very soles of her feet and other more secret places, for when there was any difficulty to find the mark they did quite unclothe them". In a society that prized women's modesty, this ritual would have been deeply humiliating.

Trials also differed between England and Scotland. English judicial processes were largely centralised, and witch trials were typically held in county assize courts presided over by judges appointed by the crown. Before 1662, most accused witches in Scotland were tried in haphazard local courts overseen by commissioners who might have little or no legal training. Though the central court was relatively lenient, execution rates in local trials may have been higher than 90 per cent.

Mary Cunningham was tried in Culross in 1644. Her advocate "gave in such defences as could not be answered by the procurator fiscal, who had no skill of law". The commissioners admitted defeat, and petitioned the privy council to have her tried at the central court in Edinburgh instead. Mary was lucky. Most accused witches did not have the resources to hire a lawyer, and they were not permitted to speak in their own defence.

Creating a godly state

Particular political and religious contexts underpinned Scottish witch-hunts, which sometimes erupted during periods of economic hardship or political unrest when community tensions ran higher and the authorities were keen to appease God's wrath. More broadly, they reflected a drive on the part of both church and state to transform Scotland into a godly nation. Following the 1560 Reformation, kirk sessions were established to enforce religious conformity and tackle sins such as blasphemy, swearing, drunkenness, profaning the Sabbath and illicit fornication.

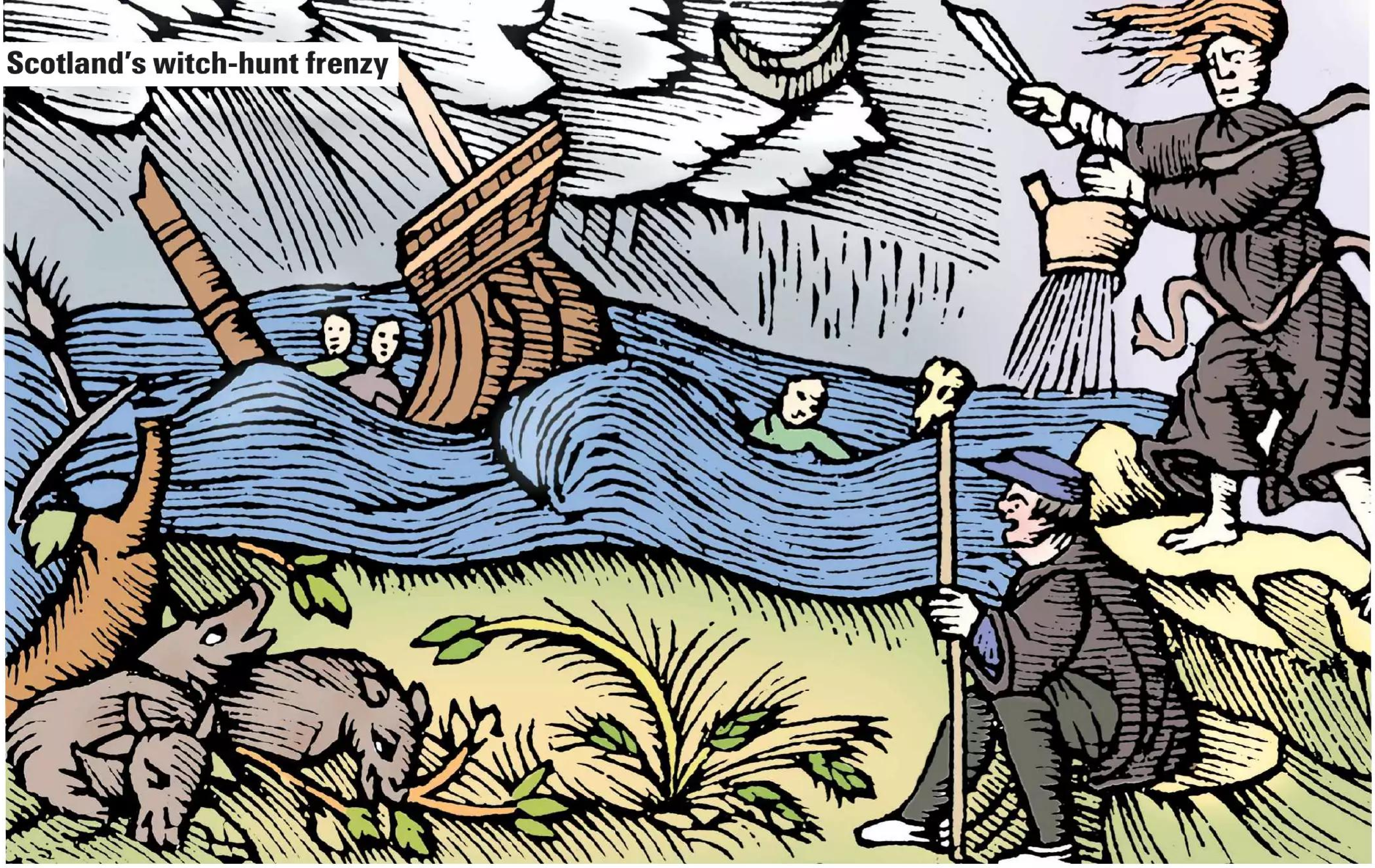
Ministers did not believe every accusation. In Ayr in 1633, Margaret McCall accused Agnes Dunschit of being "a rank witch who should be burnt quick". McCall claimed that Dunschit had come to her house on a thundery night and told her to renounce her baptism. Yet the accuser could offer no proof, and the kirk – bearing in mind that McCall was "a drunkard and keeps a bad house" – ordered her to declare publicly that she had lied.

Sometimes, however, ministers or local lairds did take accusations seriously. This was particularly likely if accusations covered a long period and were voiced by multiple people, or during periods of mass witch-hunting. Arrest and interrogation typically followed, at which point the nature of the accusations might evolve.

Neighbours commonly accused each other of acts of *maleficium*, or magical harm. In Kirkcaldy in 1633, Janet Allan testified that she had refused to give Alison Dick some sour bakes, after which the latter had declared that Allan's children would beg and that tadpoles would nest in her husband's hair. The husband was later lost at sea and their children were left destitute, leading Allan to suspect that Dick had cursed the family. The accused woman was executed a month later.

In the late 17th century, lecturers at Aberdeen University taught that women were more susceptible to demons

BRIDGEMAN/DREAMSTIME



Sinking feeling A ship is wrecked in a storm raised by a witch in a coloured woodcut of 1562. Women were far more likely to be accused of witchcraft than men

In the eyes of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities, witches targeted not just individuals but entire communities. Accused witches had entered into covenants with Satan, with the ultimate aim of dismantling godly society. As James VI explained it, witches used a variety of methods, but all worked towards "the enlarging of Satan's tyranny". Interrogators were often less concerned with investigating specific acts of *maleficium* and more with posing leading questions about diabolic pacts.

Thus Janet Barker, tried in Edinburgh in 1643, confessed that the devil promised her a red petticoat and gown, so that "she should be as trimly clad as the best servant in Edinburgh". She thereupon "condescended to be his servant for half a year". Others detailed sexual encounters with Satan, who might take the form of a man or a beast. In 1662, Jonet Braidheid from Nairn described how the devil sucked the blood out of her mark and spat it out over her head to rebaptise her, then had sex with her. He was "as cold as spring well water" inside her. He paid her afterwards, but the money turned red.

English scepticism

The Scottish privy council wielded significant power over witch-hunts, being able to grant or refuse commissions for local trials. There was no comparable state authorisation in England. Even James VI lost much of his fervour for witch-hunting after he inherited the English throne and moved to London in 1603. English elites had been known to mock the barbaric, superstitious ways of the Scots, and James was perhaps cautious of appearing credulous to his English courtiers. Moreover, it seems that he became genuinely more sceptical. In the years following his move south, he personally investigated a handful of cases of demonic possession and, in deeming them fraudulent, saved the lives of several women accused of summoning the offending demons.

Nor was the English church involved in witch-hunting to the same degree as the kirk in Scotland. The English Reformation was instigated by Henry VIII, whose motives were more political than ideological. The church remained highly centralised, and, though parish churches were important hubs, they did not develop the same powers of social control as kirk sessions. In Scotland, the Reformation was a relatively radical grassroots movement dedicated to refashioning the nation into a place of unrivalled godliness. It introduced a Presbyterian structure that placed significant power in the hands of local elders.

The relatively limited role of English clergymen in witch-hunting, as well as the more effective prohibition of torture, meant that English witchcraft trials remained largely focused on *maleficium* – the act of causing harm – rather than the more explicitly religious crime of diabolism. Demonological ideas were explored in popular pamphlets but were rarely voiced in courtrooms. An exception came during the 1640s in the chaos of the Civil War, when the infamous 'Witchfinder General' Matthew Hopkins spearheaded England's bloodiest witch-hunt. In

The accused were believed to have entered into covenants with Satan, with the aim of dismantling godly society

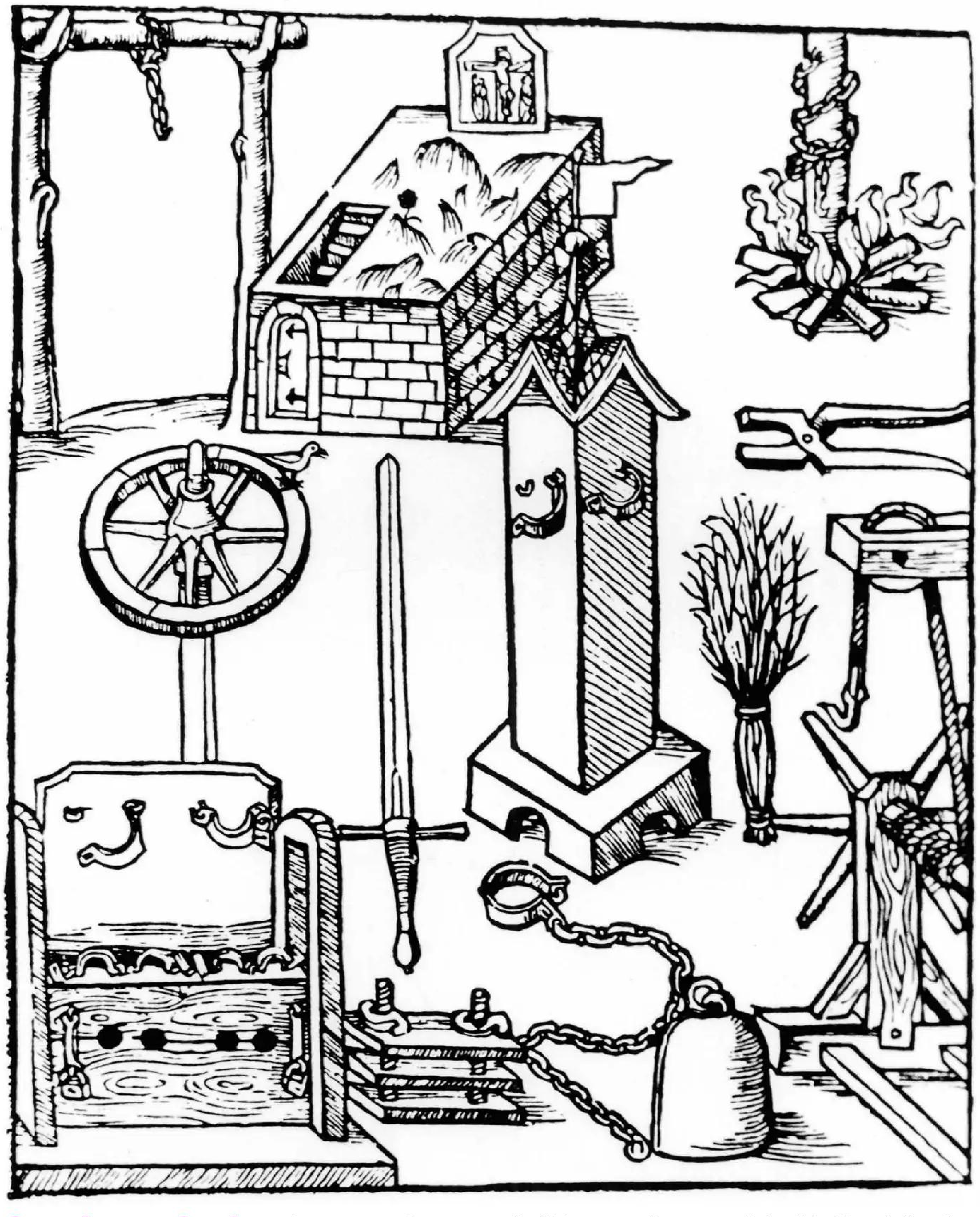
GETTY IMAGES/DREAMSTIME

general, though, accused witches in Scotland were blamed for more dramatic and far-reaching crimes against Christendom than their English counterparts.

The phenomenon fades

By the late 17th century, witchcraft prosecutions were declining across Europe, and elite attitudes in Britain reflected that trend. Consider the large-scale Scottish witch-hunt in 1661–62, which involved at least 600 accusations and likely hundreds of executions. The privy council granted commissions for waves of trials, but officials soon began to worry that matters were getting out of hand. In April 1662, the council issued a proclamation declaring that “a great many persons… have been apprehended and hurried to prisons, pricked, tortured and abused… by such persons as have no warrant or authority so to do.” The council was taking aim at ministers and other local elites who had overstepped their commissions or neglected to secure them.

Janet Horne was reputedly accused of riding her daughter, who took the form of a pony, to pay homage to the devil



Coercing confessions Instruments of torture used in 16th-century European witch-trials. Though illegal without a warrant from the privy council, torture was sometimes used in Scotland to obtain confessions

DREAMSTIME/TOPFOTO

The privy council subsequently became more reluctant to grant commissions for local trials. A growing proportion of those accused of witchcraft were tried centrally or by trained judges from Edinburgh operating in circuit courts, and defence lawyers increasingly challenged the evidential basis for witchcraft, resulting in far higher acquittal rates. The council also made efforts to clamp down on the illicit use of torture.

The lawyer George Mackenzie, lord advocate 1677–86, exemplifies the growing scepticism of legal professionals. He wrote in 1678 that he did not doubt the reality of witches, but believed that many “poor ignorant creatures” had been unfairly prosecuted in Scotland. He attributed confessions to the use of torture, and recounted speaking with an impoverished woman who avowed that she had confessed because she expected to starve otherwise; having been accused of witchcraft, she imagined that “all men would beat her, and hound Dogs at her, and… therefore she desired to be out of the World”.

Prosecutions petered out in the early 18th century; the last is usually considered to be that of Janet Horne in 1727. She was reputedly accused of riding her daughter, who took the form of a pony, to pay homage to the devil; both were reportedly tried by the local sheriff and found guilty. The daughter escaped, but Horne was burned to death in a barrel of pitch. However, the evidence is uncertain. If this episode did take place, it may have been a lynching rather than a formal trial, without authorisation from the central authorities.

Witchcraft was decriminalised in 1736, bringing an end to what Walter Scott called a “dark chapter in human nature”. However, the witch-hunts remain a culturally relevant and emotive subject. As recently as 2022, the Scottish government and the Church of Scotland made formal apologies for their historical roles in witch-hunting. And the attitudes and concerns that drove these persecutions are still germane today. Witch-hunting grew out of specific religious, political and cultural contexts – but reflected an enduring human tendency to turn largely powerless victims into enemies of state and society. **H**

Martha McGill is a research associate at the University of Cambridge. She helped develop two games exploring historical perceptions of witchcraft. You can download them at *witchhunt1649.com*

Listen to the BBC Radio Scotland series **Witch Hunt** investigating these events at *bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07vdzxh*

BBC RADIO SCOTLAND

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

When did people first start wearing undergarments?

Grappling with bra hooks and slipping on boxers is an instinctive part of getting dressed today, but these sartorial innovations entered our wardrobes in their current form only in the 20th century. Georgian women did not wear knickers, and the Lycra required for men's briefs was not invented until 1958.

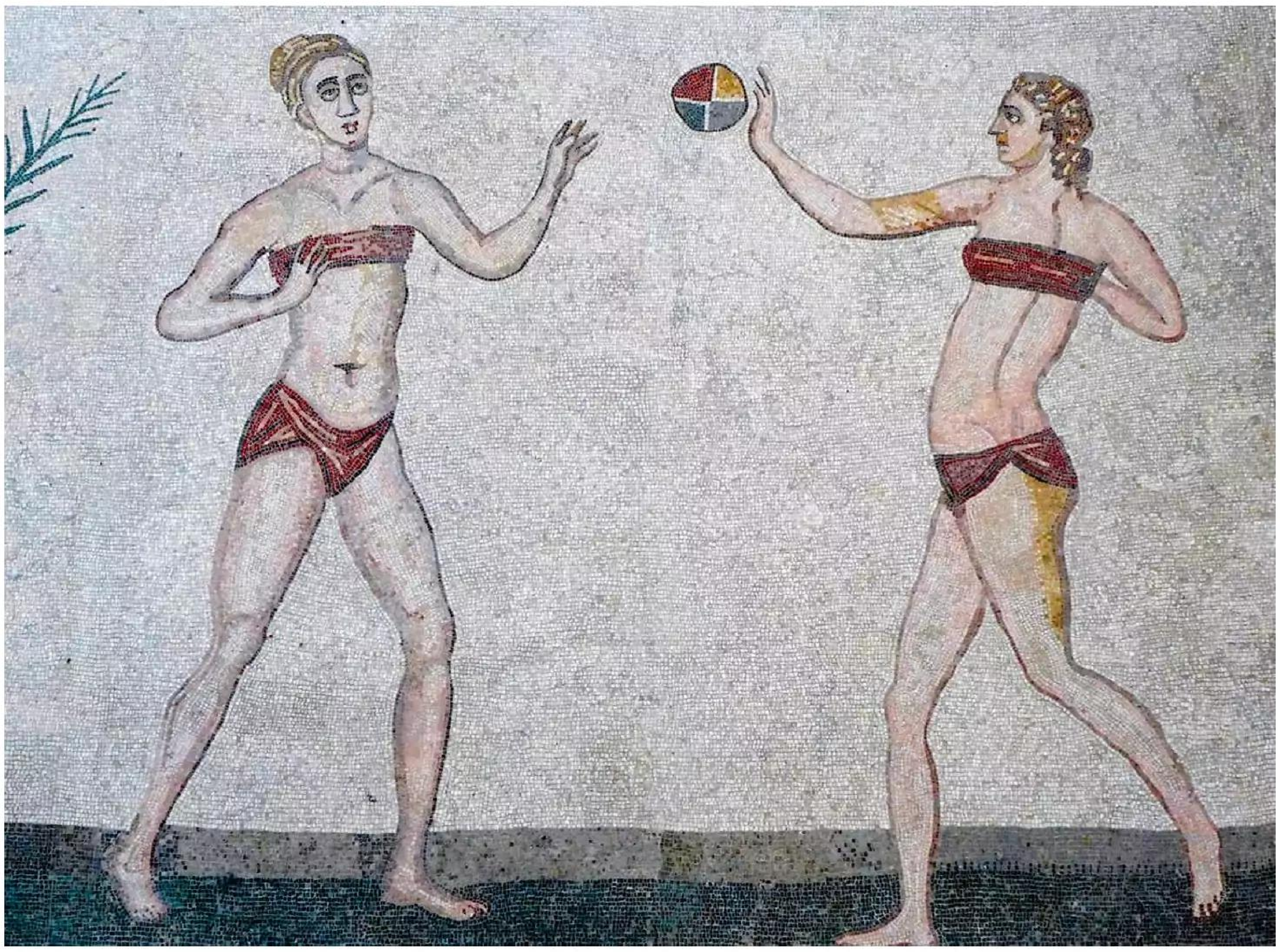
Though these familiar items were absent from historical wardrobes, forms of underwear have existed for millennia. It is unclear, however, whether our ancestors would have thought of the garments they wore closest to the skin as underclothes. Loincloths – lengths of textile wrapped around the crotch – have been worn for thousands of years. But types of loincloth, such as the Egyptian *shendyt* and Aztec *maxtlatl*, were routinely worn with nothing on top.

In colder climes, Germanic and Celtic tribes wore their versions of the loincloth, known as *braies* or *braccae*, underneath tunics and hose. This layering of clothing recast the loincloth into the role of undergarment, where it gradually transformed into under-breeches before evolving into the pants of today.

The shirt has been the most ubiquitous piece of underwear since at least the medieval period. Alongside the shift or smock worn by women, the T-shaped shirt was primarily donned for reasons of hygiene: these linen garments would minimise odour, wick sweat away from the body and could be easily laundered. They also protected the skin from the rubbing of armour, corsets or coarse woollen clothing.

Today, underwear is often sexy. It sparks debate about morality, sexuality and modesty. To our ancestors, though, it was chiefly practical.

Serena Dyer, associate professor of fashion history, De Montfort University



Young women play a ball game wearing *subligacula* (loincloths) and *strophia* (breastbands) in a mosaic in a fourth-century AD Roman villa. Most underwear as we know it today evolved in the 20th century

A marble bust of the Roman emperor Vespasian, who introduced a tax on urine around AD 70

Why did the Romans tax urine?

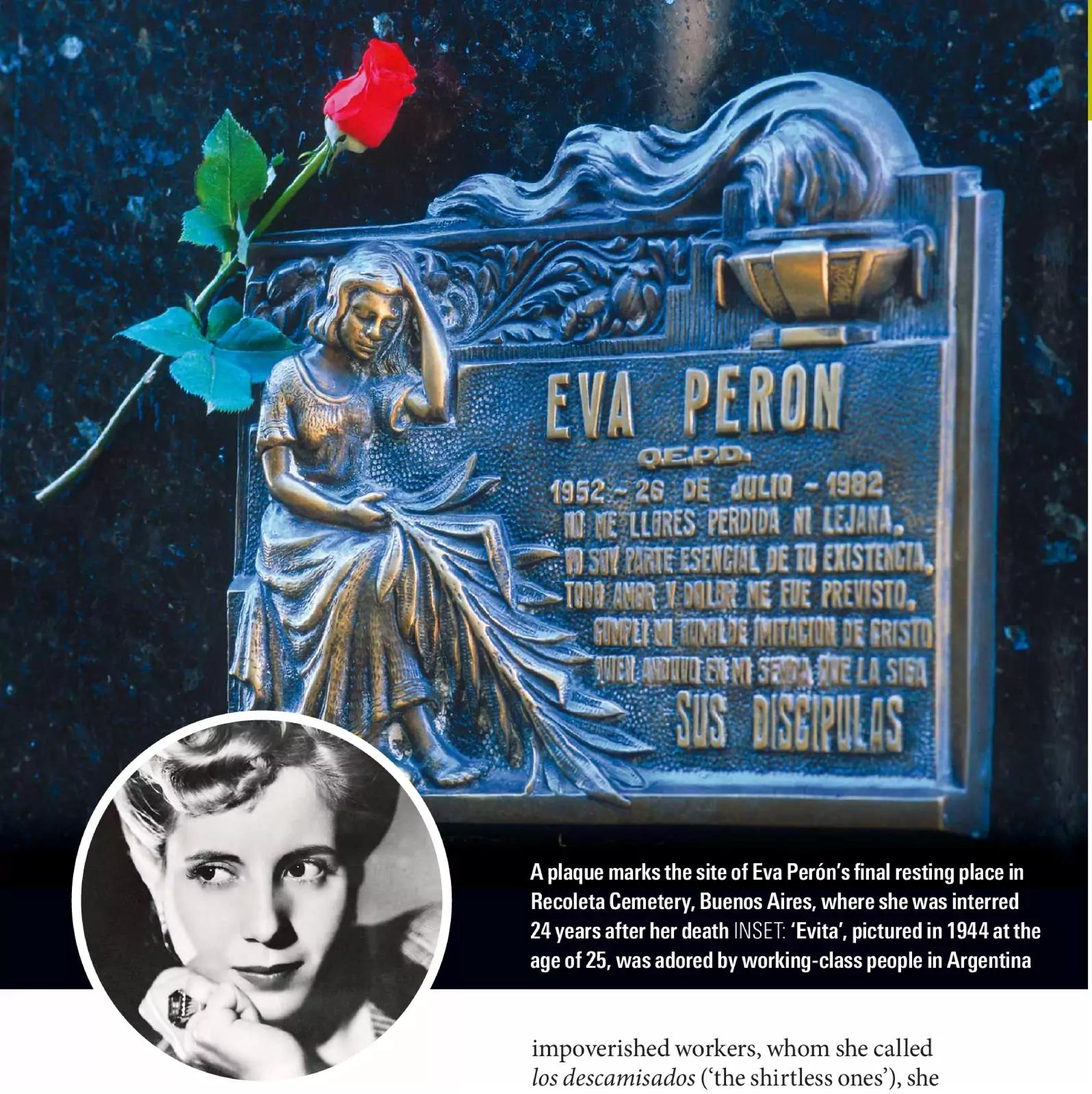
Where we might see wee as waste, the ancient Romans saw a revenue stream. Urine had many uses. Containing nitrogen and phosphorus, it was useful as a soil fertiliser. Meanwhile, the presence of ammonia made it an effective cleaning agent: urine was a key ingredient used in the laundering of clothes and tanning of leather.

So when the Roman emperor Vespasian (ruled AD 69–79) needed to restore Rome's finances, he introduced a variety of levies including the *vectigal urinae* (urine tax), paid by those collecting vats of wee from public toilets.

Nero had earlier attempted a similar tax, but it had proved unpopular and was discontinued. Likewise, not everyone was happy with Vespasian's tax – including his son, Titus, who considered it a low way of raising money. His father responded by holding up a coin and asking whether it smelled. When Titus said no, Vespasian replied: "Yet it comes from urine." This popularised the Latin phrase *Pecunia non olet* (money does not stink) – essentially, money is money, no matter how it is made.

Jonny Wilkes, freelance writer

ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN


EVA PERON
Q.E.P.D.
1952 – 26 DE JULIO – 1982
NO ME LLORES PERDIDA NI LEJANA,
YO SOY PARTE ESENCIAL DE TU EXISTENCIA,
TODO AMOR Y DOLOR ME FUE PREVISTO,
CUMPLI MI HUMILDE IMITACION DE CRISTO
QUIEN ANDUVO EN MI SENDA QUE LA SIGA
SUS DISCIPULAS

A plaque marks the site of Eva Perón's final resting place in Recoleta Cemetery, Buenos Aires, where she was interred 24 years after her death INSET: **'Evita', pictured in 1944 at the age of 25, was adored by working-class people in Argentina**

ALAMY

What happened to Eva Perón's body after she died?

››› On 26 July 1952, Eva Perón, the first lady of Argentina, died of cervical cancer at the age of 33. The nation was overcome with grief: businesses shut and voices clamoured for Evita, as she had been known affectionately, to be canonised. Millions flocked to Buenos Aires, waiting for hours to glimpse her lying in state.

By then it had become clear that she was destined for a life after death. Within hours of her passing, the process of embalming her corpse had been started by Pedro Ara, a Spanish pathologist who had been brought to Argentina when Eva's health had deteriorated. The body was intended to remain in public view within a magnificent monument. Before that could be built, however, her husband, Juan Perón – president since 1946 – was overthrown in a coup and fled into exile in 1955.

As first lady, Eva had been a powerful force in her husband's authoritarian administration. Though she never held an official post, she ran the ministries of labour and health. Beloved by the impoverished workers, whom she called *los descamisados* ('the shirtless ones'), she awarded pay rises to the unions, championed women's suffrage, and built hospitals, schools and orphanages. Even more than her husband, she was the figurehead of the populist movement of Peronism, dubbed the 'spiritual leader of the nation'.

The new military junta looked to expunge Peronism, and grew concerned that Eva's body – displayed at the headquarters of the trade union organisation CGT – might become a symbol of resistance. So, on the night of 22 November 1955, officers removed the body. It was kept in the city for a time, reportedly stored in a van parked on the streets or in the military intelligence offices, before being transported to Italy. Eva was then buried in Milan under the name of Maria Maggi de Magistris. Her body remained there for 16 years.

In 1971, a new military government in Argentina agreed to exhume the body and fly it to Spain, where Juan Perón was living. He then returned to Argentina and was re-elected president in 1973, but died shortly afterwards. His third wife, Isabel, brought Eva back to her homeland and, some 24 years after her death, she was interred in her family mausoleum in Recoleta Cemetery – buried deep underground in a fortified tomb to ensure that she was at last able to rest in peace. *JW*

DID YOU KNOW…?

Monster hit

The state song of California was written by… Frankenstein. In 1913, while he was the conductor of a theatre orchestra in Los Angeles, Abraham Franklin Frankenstein (1873–1934) was given a lyric, written by a man named Silverwood, beginning with the line: "I love you, California, you're the greatest state of all." Frankenstein set the words to music, and the song was first performed later that year by opera star Mary Garden. It became the official state song in 1951.

Returning serve

A one-armed tennis player competed at Wimbledon between 1947 and 1956, reaching the fourth round of the men's singles at his first attempt. Austrian Hans Redl had been badly wounded at the battle of Stalingrad, after which his left arm was amputated. Determined to continue what had been a promising tennis career, he developed a new technique for his serve, resting the ball on his racquet before flipping it up into the air to hit it.

Fool's gold

In 1896, the Louvre purchased and displayed a gold tiara claimed to be more than 2,000 years old and once the property of the Scythian king Saitaphernes. Unfortunately, it transpired that the tiara had been created not in the ancient past but no more than two years earlier, commissioned from a skilled goldsmith by unscrupulous dealers in antiquities who sold it to the museum. The so-called Tiara of Saitaphernes was denounced as a fake in 1903 and withdrawn from public view.

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising 8in history

This tiara was bought by the Louvre in 1896 as a two-millennia-old artefact – but was in fact crafted much more recently

WHY DO WE SAY…

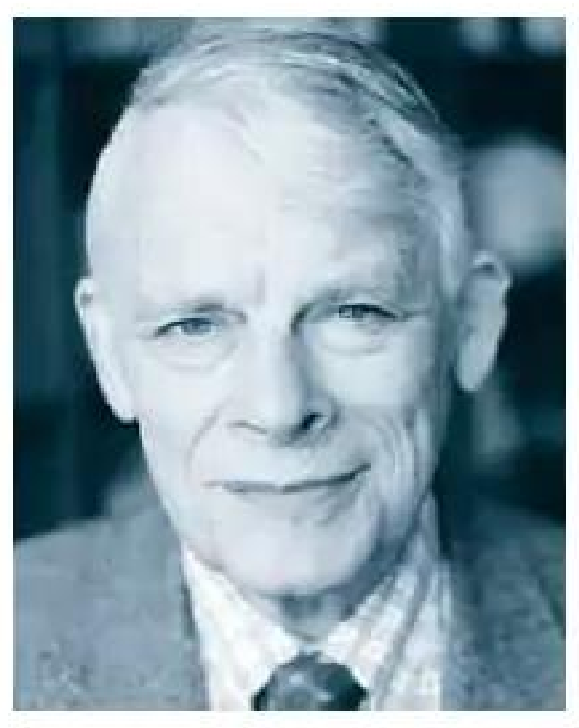
… To put a spoke in the wheel?

▸▸▸ This idiom means 'to obstruct or destroy a plan or action'. Curiously, two centuries ago it was understood by some as meaning 'to provide help' – and indeed, what is wrong with supplying a spoke for a wheel? Surely wheels require spokes – so why would putting one in cause problems?

The phrase has been known in English since at least the end of the 16th century. Its source is believed to be the Dutch *een spaak in't wiel steken*, the equivalent of the English phrase with the same meaning, though the route from Dutch to English has not been traced. (Out of interest, another related phrase recorded in the OED is 'to put in one's spoke' – to give advice.)

An explanation offered as early as 1854 suggested that the 'spoke' in this idiom is not a radial rod of a wheel but a bar placed between the spokes at right angles in order to prevent the wheel from turning – a rude way of locking it. This explanation makes sense, and perhaps is true.

As a postscript, consider the enigmatic word 'spokesman' ('speakman' also existed). Under no circumstances could anyone coin *spoke-s-man* from the past tense of speak. But in the 16th century, 'spoke' was associated with help and assistance (as in 'I'll give you a spoke', cited by an American speaker), so 'spokesman' aligns with 'marksman', 'craftsman' and the rest. In this case, the association with speak is late.



Anatoly Liberman, professor and author of *An Analytic Dictionary of English Etymology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008)

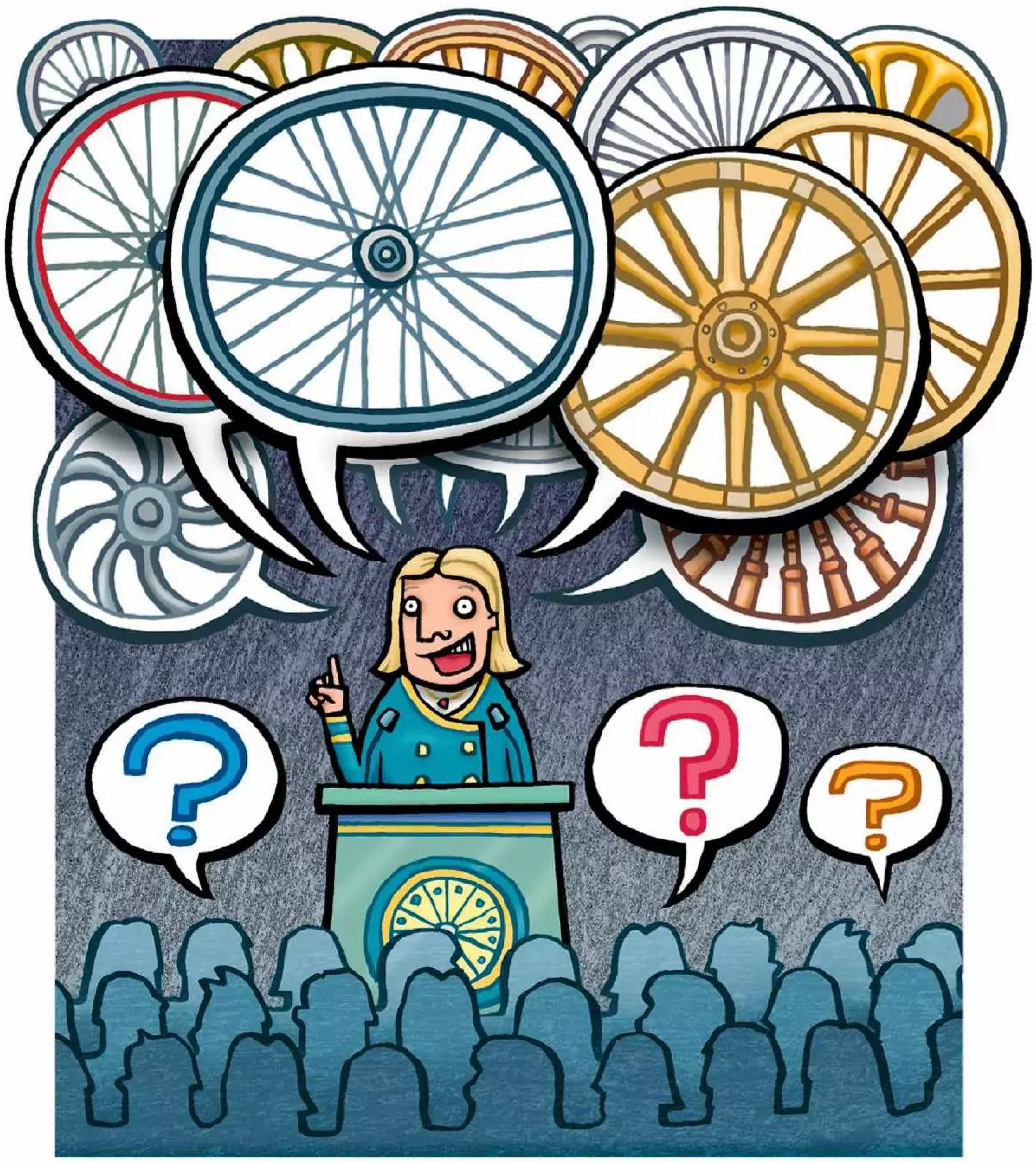
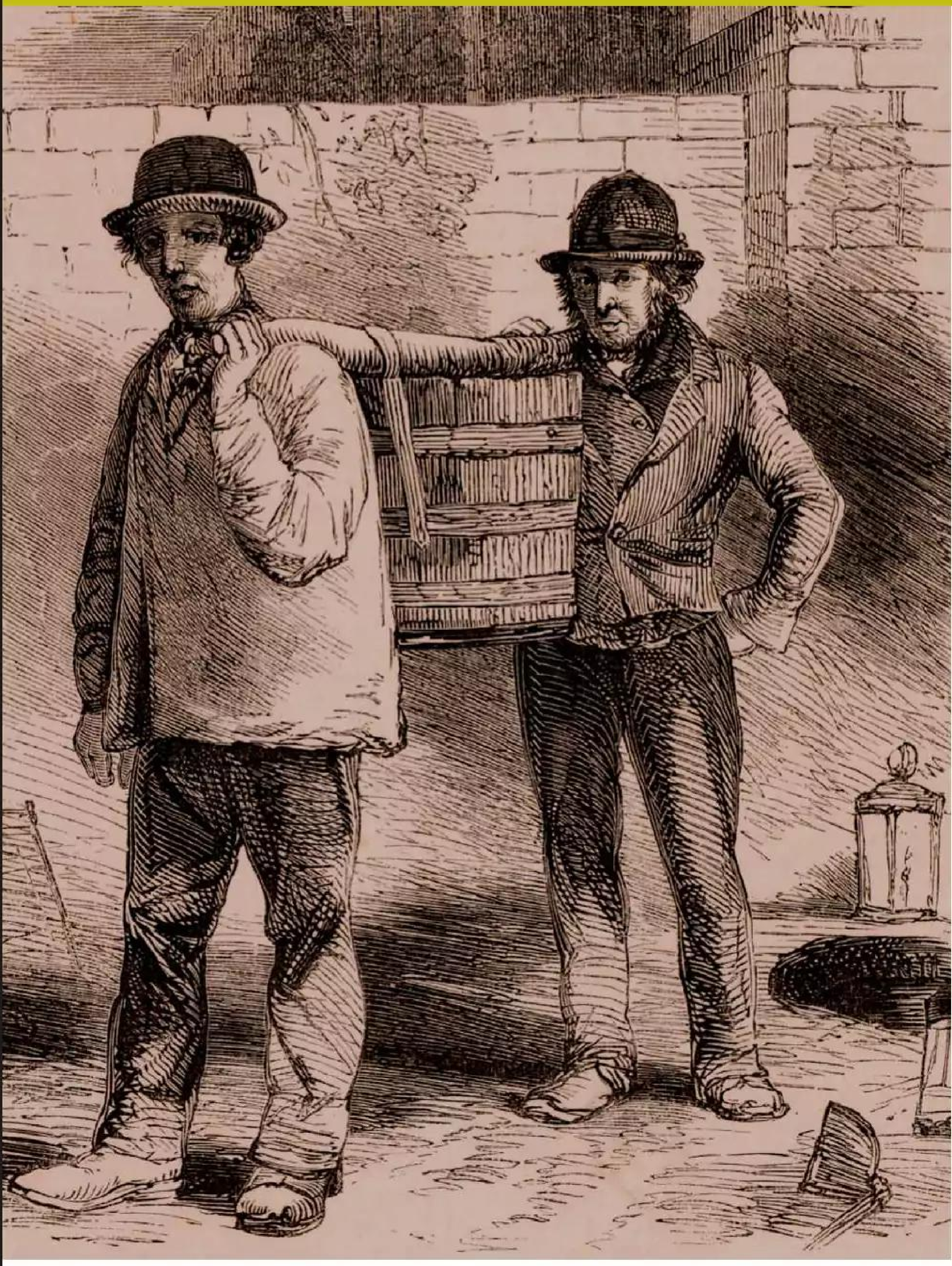


ILLUSTRATION BY **GLEN McBETH**



A mid-19th-century lithograph shows two night-soil men lugging a bucket of faeces removed from London cesspools

BRIDGEMAN

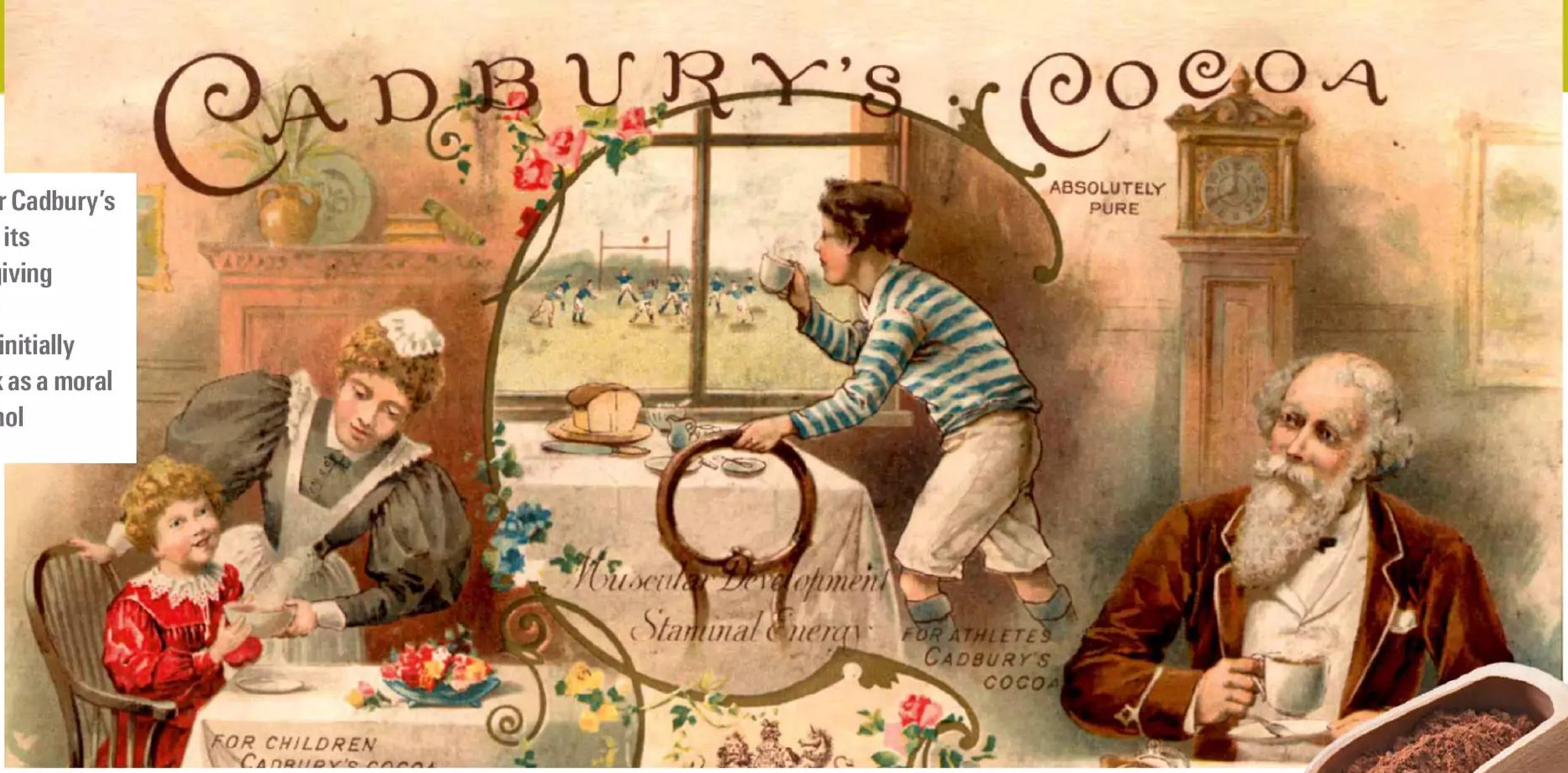
Who were night-soil men?

▸▸▸ From the 16th to the mid-19th century, 'night soil' – the polite expression for human excrement – was collected in cities by poor labourers. These night-soil men visited neighbourhoods at night and removed the contents of cesspools – pits into which the waste from privies emptied.

By the 1850s, London's population had soared rapidly to 2.5 million, and the system of collecting effluent in buckets every night and removing it in horse-drawn carts to the countryside, where it was sold to farmers as fertiliser, became unfeasible. Excess human waste overflowed directly into the Thames, the main source of Londoners' drinking water, leading to outbreaks of cholera.

Things came to a head in the hot summer of 1858, when the river turned black with filth, creating the unbearable 'Great Stink'. Parliament quickly passed the act that enabled engineer Joseph Bazalgette to build a vast sewage system to carry effluent out of London to the Thames Estuary and out to sea.

Rosemary Ashton, honorary fellow at University College London



A c1890s advert for Cadbury's Cocoa emphasises its purported health-giving properties. Quaker chocolate-makers initially promoted the drink as a moral alternative to alcohol

How did Quakers become involved in chocolate-making?

⋙ Think of leading British chocolate-makers and the names Cadbury, Rowntree and Fry may spring to mind. What's less well known is that all three companies were started by Quakers. From small beginnings as family businesses, by 1990 these companies produced half of all the chocolate consumed in the UK. In fact, none of these companies started out making chocolate, though it became the main business for all three.

In 1761, apothecary and doctor Joseph Fry (1728–87) purchased a chocolate business from Walter Churchman. Within three years he had agents selling his products in no fewer than 53 towns.

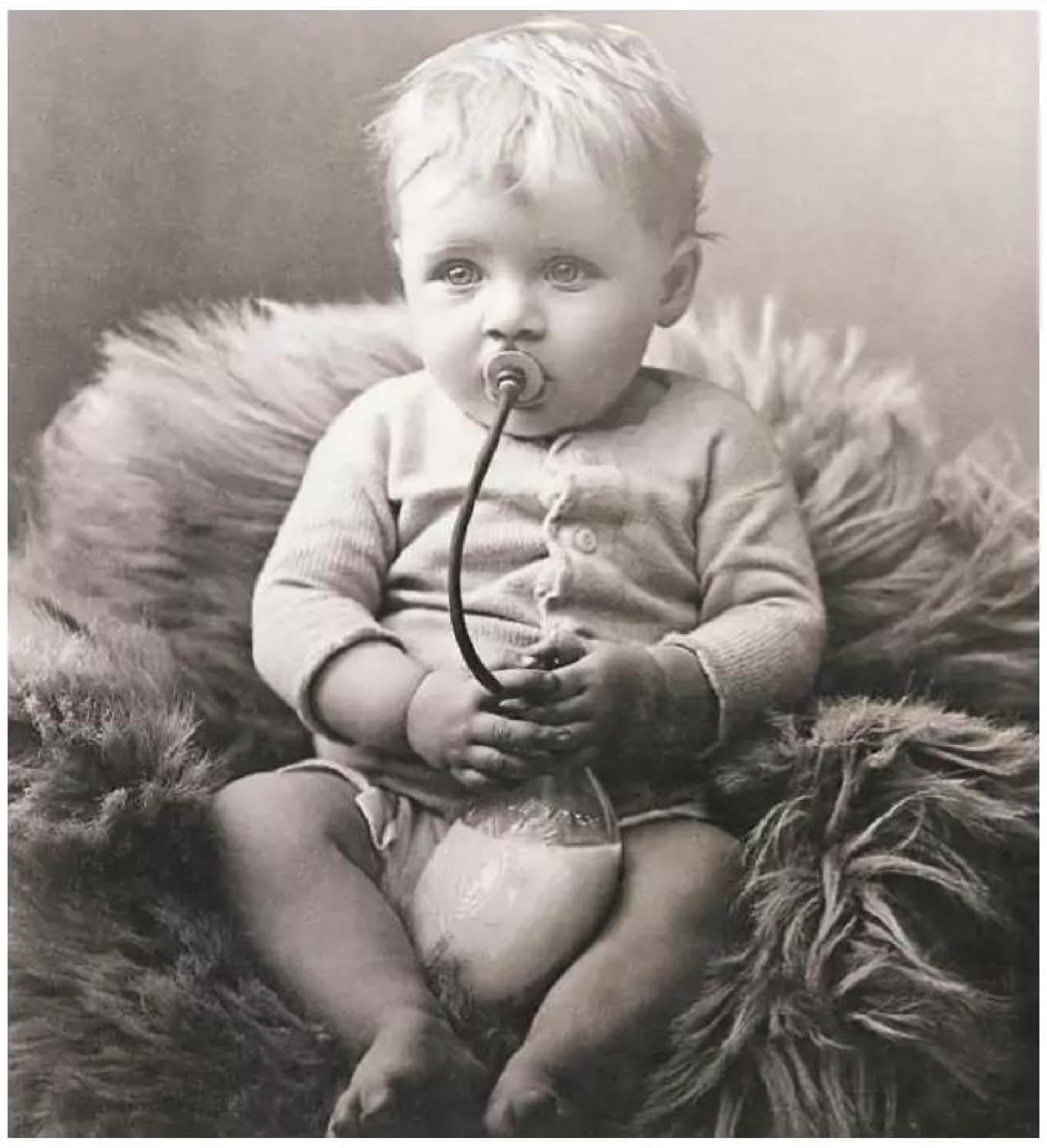
John Cadbury (1801–89) began his commercial life in the tea trade. He started marketing cocoa powder as an instant drink from about 1830, and by 1842 was offering 16 varieties of drinking chocolate. As a Quaker in the 19th century, Cadbury saw cocoa as a moral alternative to alcohol – the ideal temperance drink. In 1853, the newly named Cadbury Brothers was appointed cocoa manufacturer to Queen Victoria.

It was John's sons, George and Richard, taking over in the 1860s, who really developed the business. They moved their factory from the centre of Birmingham to the countryside, naming the new development Bournville to suggest a connection between their chocolate and the leading products from France. At Bournville, they developed a model village with sanitary housing for their employees, as well as a range of benefit schemes.

Joseph Rowntree (1836–1925) was initially a grocer, but gave that up to help the failing business of his brother, Henry Isaac, who had bought a cocoa and chocolate company from another Quaker family in York, the Tukes. Like the Cadburys, the Rowntrees continually sought innovation in production techniques to improve the quality of their products. Their business grew hugely, particularly towards the end of the 19th century; sales increased tenfold within 20 years, and the workforce soared from 200 to 4,000.

The first Quakers refused to haggle, instead selling at a fixed and fair price, and were renowned for their integrity, becoming trusted with other people's money; Lloyds and Barclays Banks also had Quaker origins. All three big Quaker chocolate companies were driven by the desire to produce quality cocoa products, and all tried to be model employers, using their wealth for major philanthropic projects. The trusts that Joseph Rowntree set up, for example, continue to be committed to the Quaker principles of social justice and the alleviation of poverty and its consequences.

Ben Pink Dandelion, honorary professor of Quaker studies, University of Birmingham



ALAMY/DREAMSTIME/GETTY IMAGES

An 1892 photo shows a baby sucking contentedly on the teat of a so-called 'murder bottle'

What was a 'murder bottle'?

⋙ In Victorian Britain, infant mortality rates were alarmingly high. Up to 15 per cent of babies died within their first year – and an innovation in child-rearing became a major factor contributing to this dismal statistic.

During this era, it was considered unfashionable for aristocratic mothers to breastfeed their own offspring. Instead, many delegated their children's sustenance to wet nurses. Even Queen Victoria employed them, reflecting and reinforcing the perception that breastfeeding was unbefitting for women of status. Middle-class families soon emulated this practice, turning to bottle feeding.

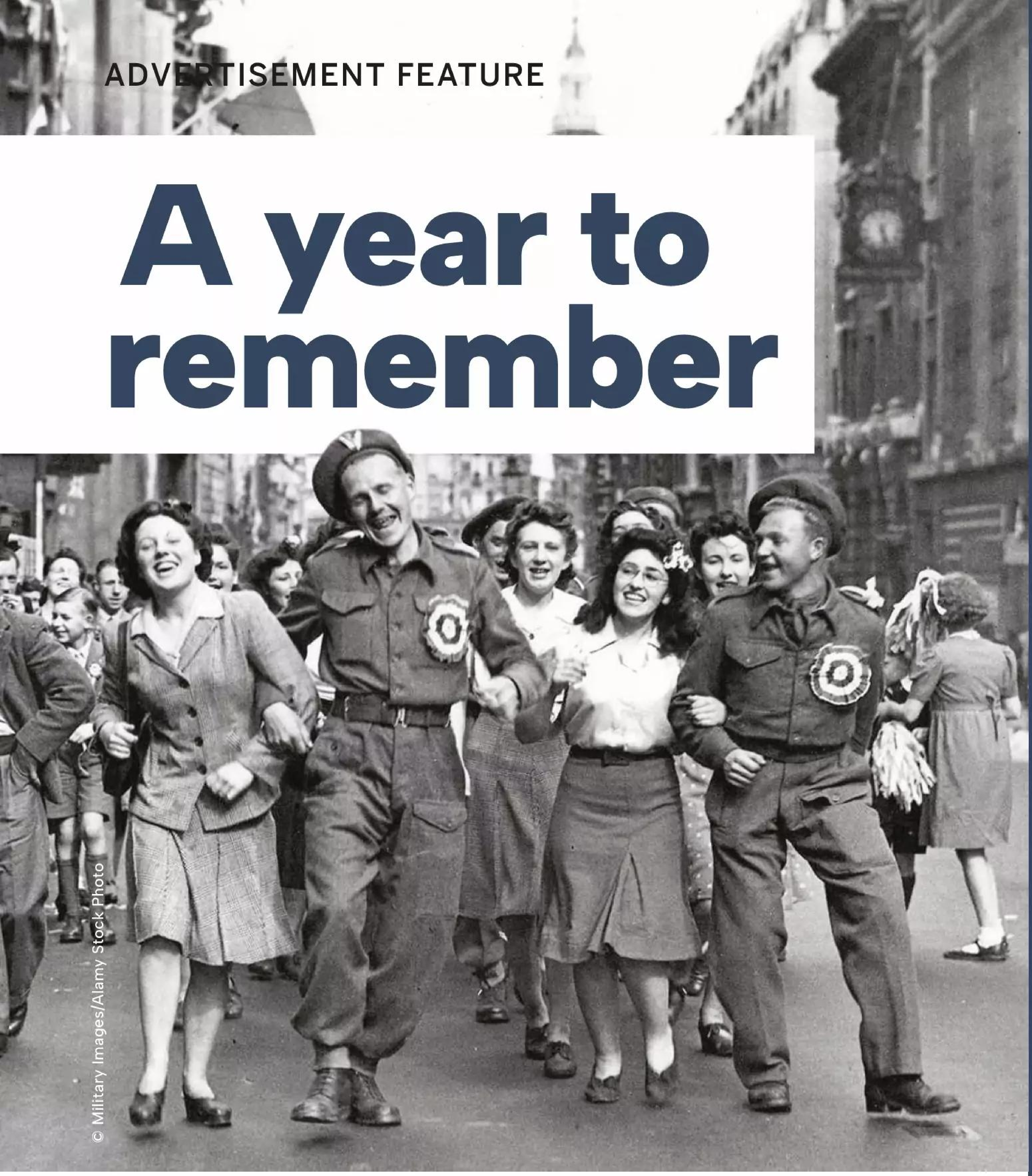
Around this time, feeding devices consisting of curved glass bottles with sealed ends, rubber tubing and teats revolutionised baby feeding – a lactating woman no longer needed to be present. However, the design trapped milk residue and was nearly impossible to clean, fostering bacterial growth. This caused severe gastrointestinal and respiratory illnesses, contributing to high infant mortality rates and spawning the grim nickname 'murder bottle' for these feeding utensils.

By the late 19th century, the wide acceptance of germ theory spurred public outcry and a drive for safer designs, such as more easy-to-clean bottles with detachable parts. This marked a shift toward better hygiene and safety, reducing infant mortality and transforming childcare practices. H

Danny Bird, content producer

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

A year to remember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COMMEMORATE THOSE WHO SERVED IN WORLD WAR II AND MARK THE ANNIVERSARIES OF BOTH VE AND VJ DAY WITH *THE YEAR WAS 1945...* AT THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM

Established nearly 25 years ago, the National Memorial Arboretum is the UK's centre of Remembrance. Nestled on the edge of the National Forest in Staffordshire, the 150-acre estate is home to more than 400 memorials and is a place of reflection, inspiration and discovery, where those who lived and lost their lives in service are remembered all year round.

Each year, the Arboretum plays host to hundreds of commemorative services and events, such as its upcoming programme, *The Year Was 1945...*, which marks the 80th anniversary of the end of the World War II.

Designed for all ages, it features a range of activities, exhibitions and talks that invite you to learn more about our country's past, while also allowing you to explore the surrounding gardens and woodlands, and make new memories with your loved ones.

WHAT'S ON?

During the war, British people from all walks of life – from ordinary civilians to the armed forces and emergency services – carried out extraordinary acts of service and sacrifice. Here's how *The Year Was 1945...* will tell their stories.

VE DAY CELEBRATIONS

On 8 May 1945, millions took to the streets to celebrate the German surrender. Now, to commemorate Victory in Europe (VE) Day, the Arboretum is hosting a free weekend of activities on 3-5 May 2025 inspired by the street parties of 1945, with costumed actors, live performances, vintage dance workshops and visitor singalongs.

EXHIBITIONS

You can explore the Far East Prisoners of War Memorial Building, a permanent exhibition that shares the experiences of Commonwealth Prisoners of War who were held captive in the Far East. There will also be four temporary themed exhibitions showcasing personal stories, letters, photographs and historical artefacts from veterans and civilians.

COMMEMORATIVE SERVICES

The Royal British Legion will host special services to honour those who fought in the war, acknowledging both the jubilation of victory and the solemn remembrance for those who never returned.

TOURS AND TRAILS

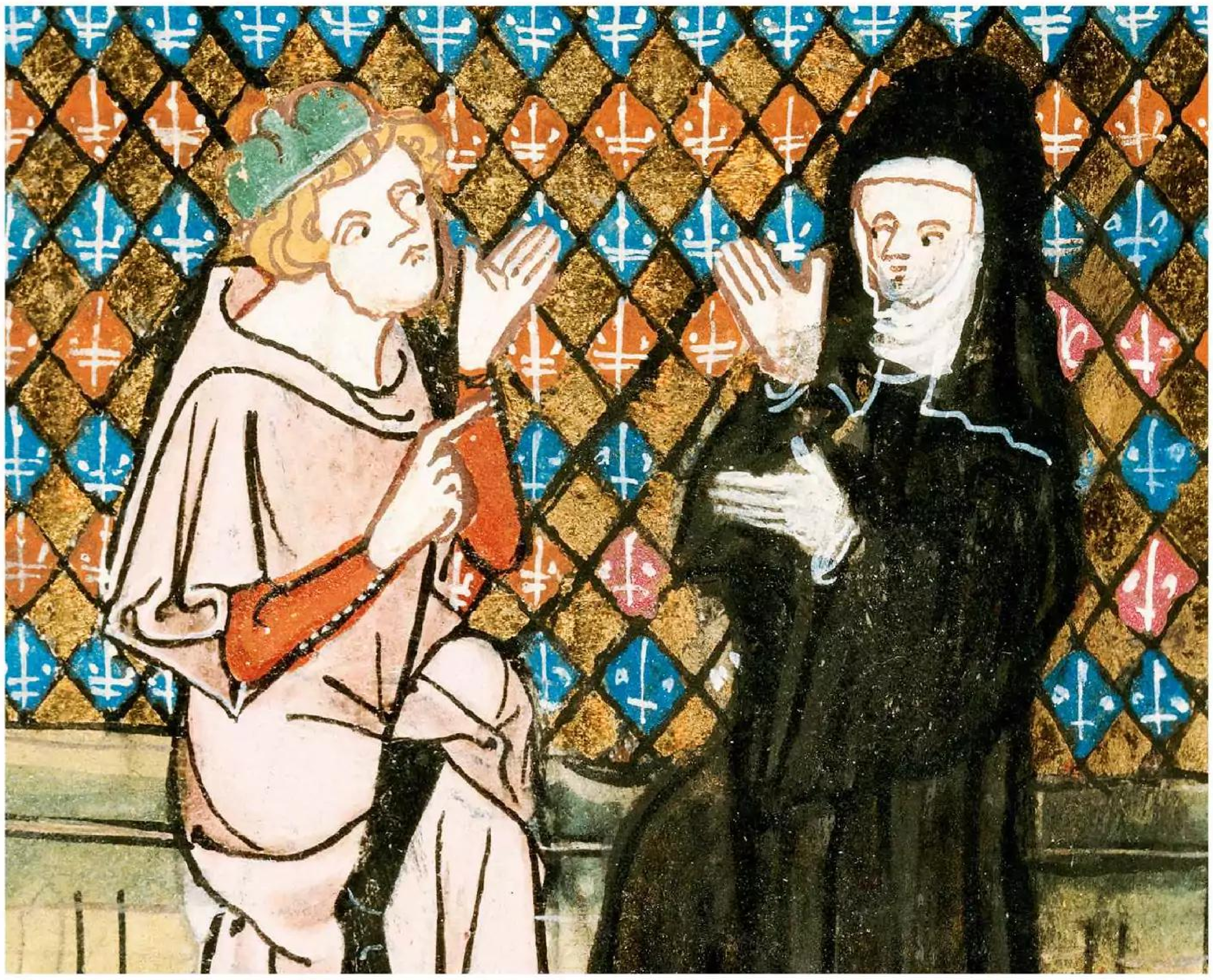
Expert guides will lead tours of the Arboretum's key memorials, dedicated to individuals and groups who played a vital role in the war effort both at home and away – including military units, the Bevin Boys and the Civil Defence Service, as well as the Women's Land Army and Timber Corps.

GUEST SPEAKER TALKS

What was life like for ordinary people on the home front in 1945? On selected dates, guest speakers will share the experiences of those who lived 80 years ago, including the impact that World War II had on their lives.

NATIONAL
MEMORIAL
ARBORETUM

Plan your visit to the National Memorial Arboretum today at **thenma.org.uk/1945**



True romance? Abélard and Héloïse, shown in a 13th-century manuscript illustration. Widely celebrated as an exemplar of romantic love, in truth their relationship was characterised by violence and codependency

A timeless love story?

Abélard and Héloïse's passionate affair in 12th-century Paris captured imaginations in France and far beyond. Yet, writes **Yvonne Seale**, there was a dark side to this true-life tale of forbidden love

BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Many millions of visitors have streamed through the gates of the sprawling Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris since they first opened in the early 19th century. Some come to pay their respects to the many modern cultural icons buried here, leaving flowers on the grave of the singer Édith Piaf or lipstick kisses on the monument to Oscar Wilde.

Some, though, are drawn to a memorial tucked away in a corner just to the right of the cemetery's main entrance. This tomb supposedly houses the remains of two people who had already acquired semi-legendary status many centuries before the first grave was dug at Père Lachaise. It is the reputed resting place of the 12th-century abbess Héloïse of Argenteuil and her husband, philosopher Pierre Abélard.

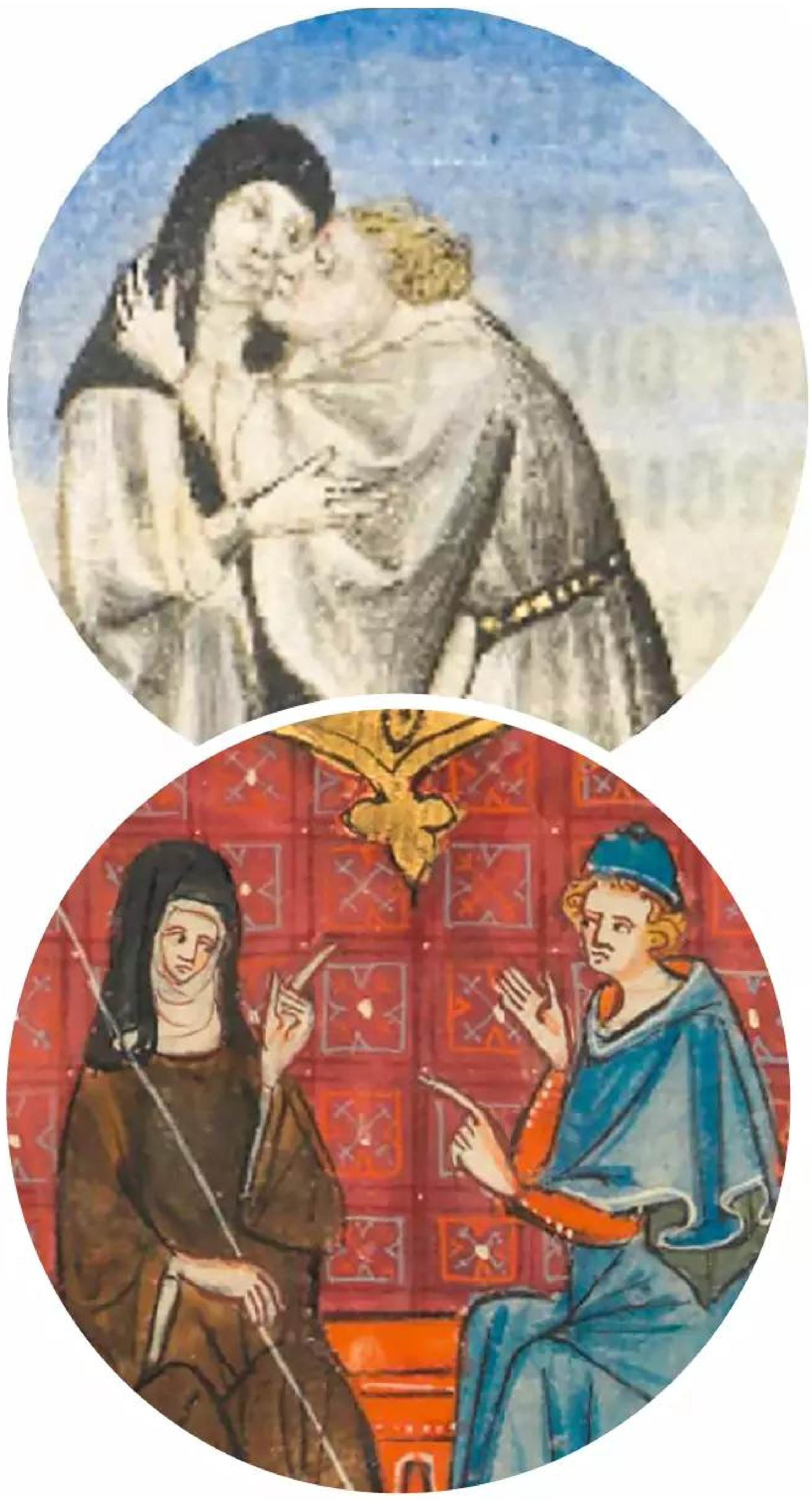
The neo-Gothic tomb, with its effigies of the couple reclining peacefully, is a picturesque stone monument to love's persistence. For that reason, it became something of a pilgrimage site in the 19th century. The writer Mark Twain rolled his eyes at the crowds of "memento-cabbaging vandals" who travelled to the tomb from all over France "to weep and wail and 'grit' their teeth over their heavy sorrows" and hope for beyond-the-grave intervention in their own unhappy love lives.

The story that draws so many visitors even today is a tale of a doomed clandestine medieval romance – that of Abélard, the rising academic star who fell for his most gifted student, Héloïse. It involves a forbidden love, a hidden pregnancy, a secret marriage, an escape in the guise of a nun, a castration, and a lengthy and final separation. If that precis reads like the plot of a television melodrama miniseries, it seemed no less sensational to people in the Middle Ages.

The story has captured the imaginations and empathy of countless people over the centuries, and been retold and depicted in numerous works of art and literature. But how accurately do these portrayals reflect the experiences of the historical Héloïse and Abélard? Was their relationship really a timeless love story – or has the reality become obscured by simplified myth-making?

Affair of the heart

Paris in the early 12th century was a vibrant, burgeoning place. Its streets were thronged with merchants and craftspeople, redolent with the aromas of fresh-baked bread, horse manure and woodsmoke, and lined by parish churches, shopfronts and a steadily increasing number of half-timbered houses.



Ill-advised embrace

The love-struck couple shown in two 15th-century manuscript illustrations. Abélard's targeting of such a young woman seems troubling today

GETTY IMAGES/BNF

At its heart lay the small island known as the Île de la Cité. Here Héloïse spent much of her adolescence living in her uncle Fulbert's household. He was part of the community of canons who served the basilica of Saint-Étienne, the now-vanished precursor to the cathedral of Notre-Dame.

Héloïse was highly intelligent, mastering not only Latin but also Greek and Hebrew – rare accomplishments for anyone in western Europe then, let alone a woman. A man with Héloïse's intellectual talents would have easily gained admission to the renowned cathedral school of Paris. However, the only way for a woman to acquire a higher-level education in that period was to employ a private tutor, so around 1115 or slightly later – when Héloïse was in her mid-teens – Fulbert hired the charismatic cleric Pierre Abélard to be her tutor.

Born in 1079, Abélard was the eldest son of a minor noble family in Brittany, but had renounced his inheritance to pursue life as a scholar. During his career, he acquired a reputation for both brilliance and arrogance, thanks to challenging, unconventional writings such as his *Theologia, Sic et Non* (Yes and No) and *Scito te Ipsum* (Know Yourself).

Having heard tell of Héloïse's beauty and intelligence, Abélard decided – before he had even met her – that "she was the one to bring to [his] bed". He was not given to praising others' intelligence lightly, but he wrote that "for her wealth in letters, she was supreme" and that her intellect "made her highly praised throughout the entire realm".

Despite their age gap – roughly two decades – and the fact that he was her teacher, they quickly entered into a sexual relationship. They tried their best to keep this a secret but, once Héloïse became pregnant, that was no longer possible. She slipped out of the city disguised as a nun, and travelled to stay with Abélard's family in Brittany. There she gave birth to a son, giving him the distinctive name Astrolabe, and the pair married in secret.

Héloïse then hid at the convent of Argenteuil, just a little north-west of Paris, hoping to avoid her uncle's anger at her behaviour – which was considered incredibly scandalous at the time. This plan backfired spectacularly. Héloïse's relatives assumed that she had gone to the convent because Abélard had abandoned her, unmarried – and took their revenge at that perceived outrage by having Abélard attacked and castrated.

This shocking outburst of violence had a number of consequences. With Abélard's marriage now public knowledge at a time when the church was increasingly enforcing the requirement for clerical celibacy, he knew that he would not be able to continue his chosen career. His reputation, already precarious, was badly damaged. His former teacher Roscelin of Compiègne called Abélard "contemptuous" and guilty of "the filthiest violation of virginal modesty".

The couple could not now remedy the situation by setting up a household together. Following the brutal attack and his castration, Abélard was no longer able to perform the act that was thought in the Middle Ages to be one of the defining aspects of a husband's marital role. He later wrote that he "felt the shame more than the dismemberment" and "fell into such a state of despair that I thought of quitting the realm of Christendom and going over to the heathen" – a strong statement indeed from a devout Christian. In the event, Abélard became a monk at the royal abbey of Saint-Denis, just north of Paris, and urged Héloïse to take the veil herself.

She was initially reluctant to do so, feeling "no calling for the monastic profession, nor any religious devotion", but she was unshakeably loyal to her husband and eventually gave in. She joined the Benedictine monastery at Argenteuil before moving to the Abbey of the Paraclete in Ferreux-Quincey, about 60 miles

More Middle Ages
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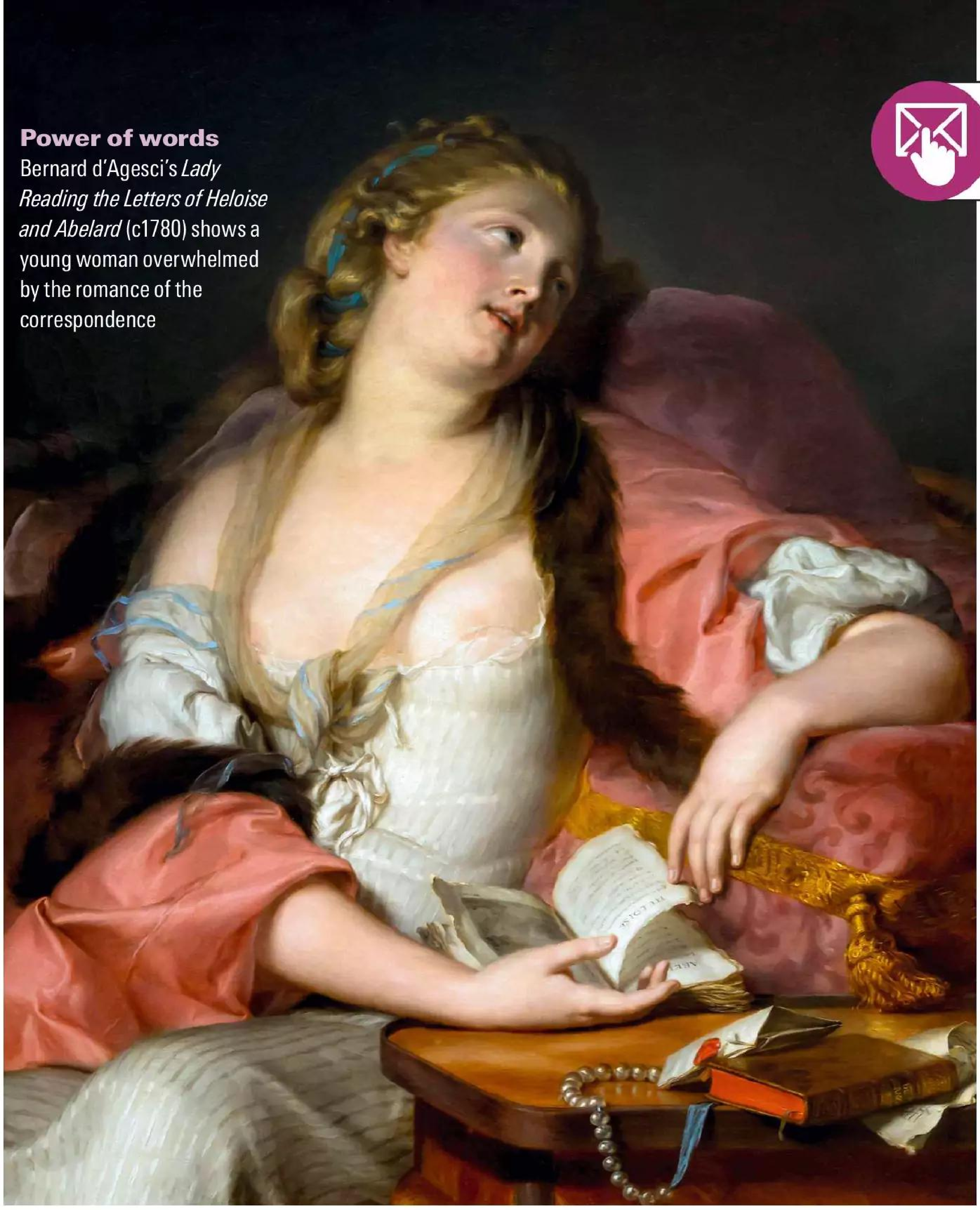
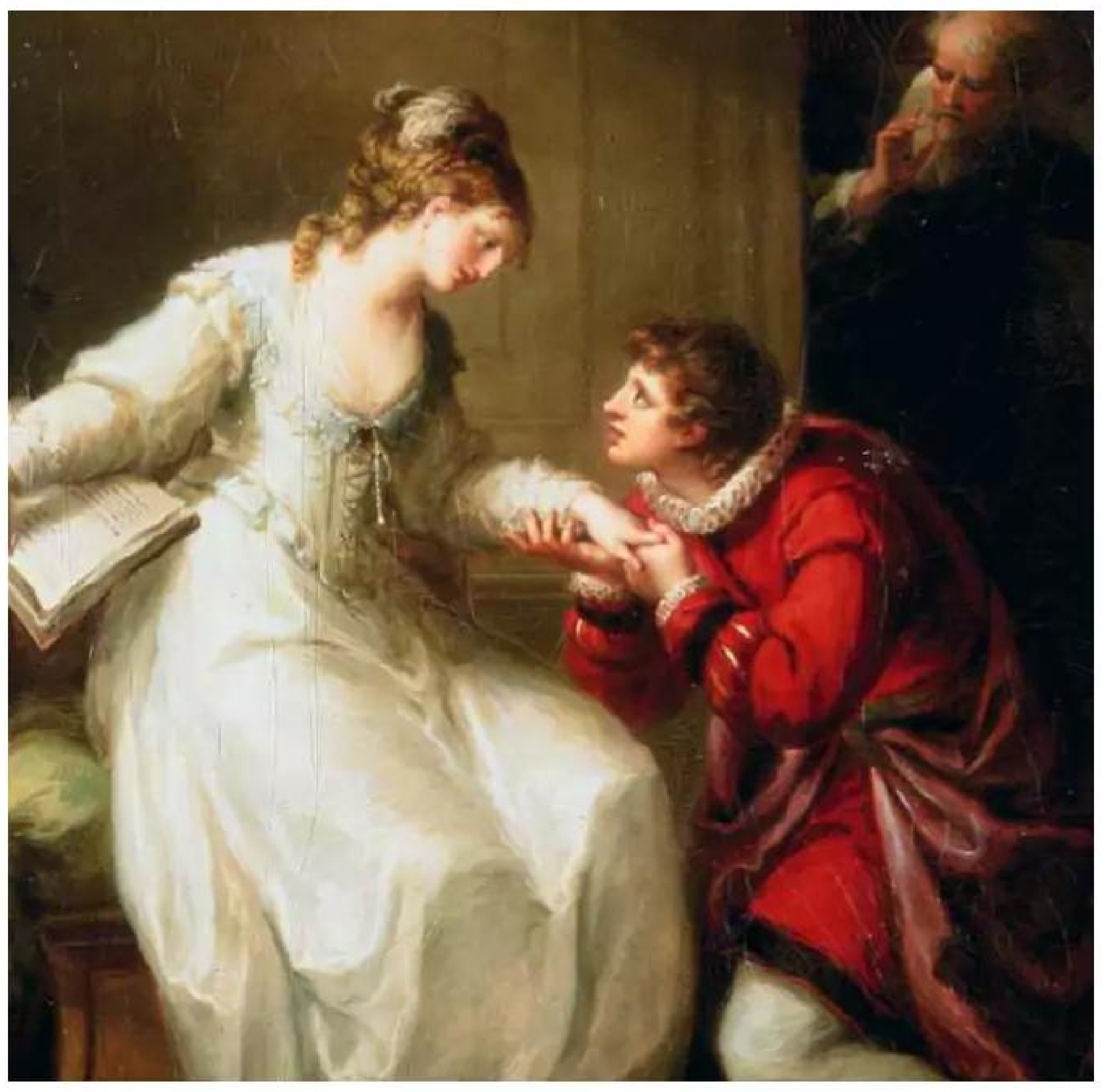
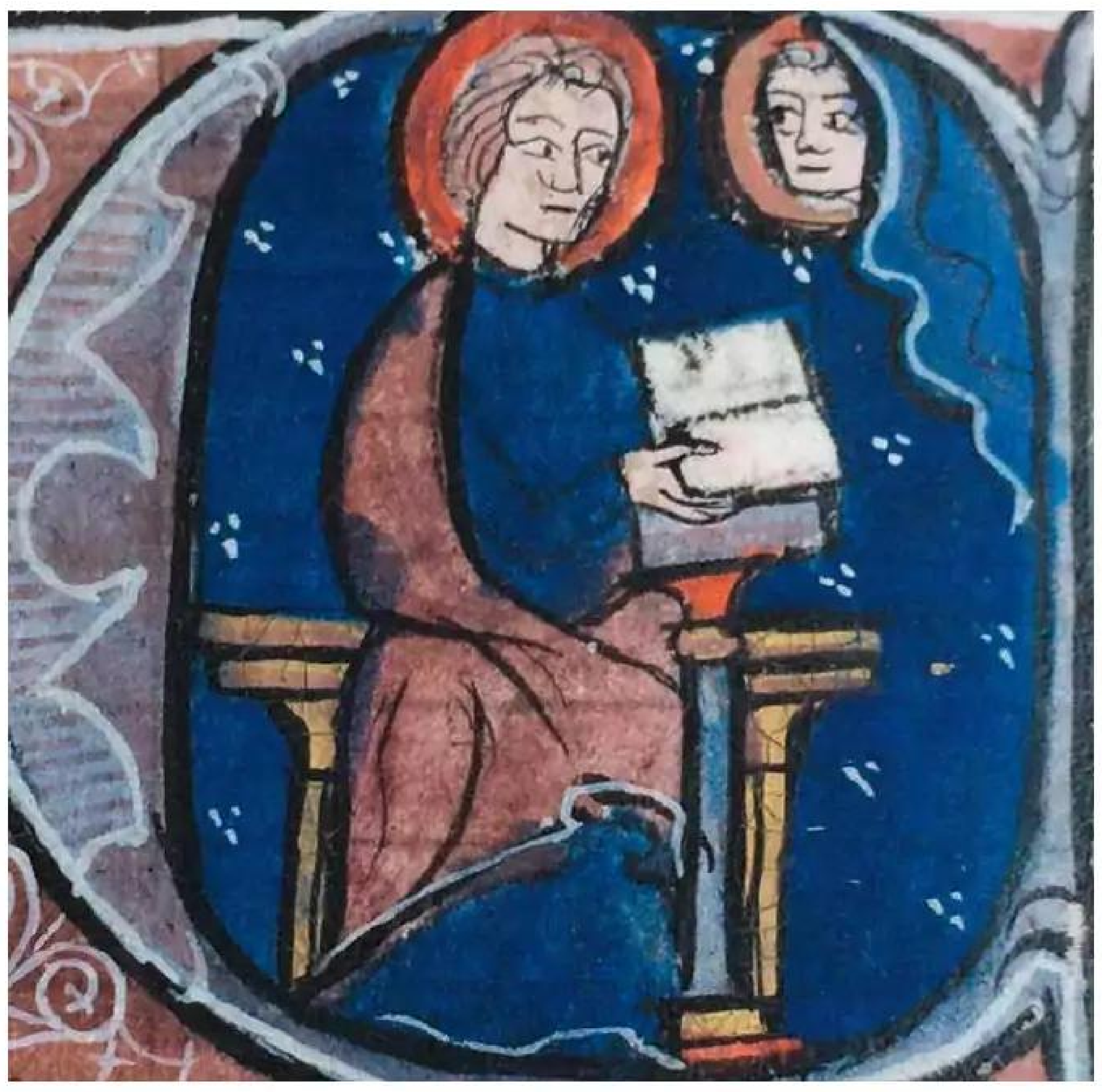


Power of words
Bernard d'Agesci's *Lady Reading the Letters of Heloise and Abélard* (c1780) shows a young woman overwhelmed by the romance of the correspondence





Artistic inspiration
TOP: *Abélard Solicits the Hand of Héloïse*, an 18th-century painting by Angelica Kauffmann
ABOVE: A figure reads the lovers' letters in a 13th-century manuscript illumination. Their story inspired many artists over the centuries

south-east of Paris. There she served as abbess and, according to the Paraclete's surviving sources, was a capable administrator who ensured that the establishment stayed on a firm financial and reputational footing. This was despite the fact that Héloïse never developed any sense of religious calling, and felt that she would receive no heavenly reward for her labours at the Paraclete because "it is certain that I have done nothing as yet for love of [God]".

After the exposure of his affair with Héloïse, Abélard retreated into religious life – but not from intellectual debate. He continued to quarrel with figures such as Bernard of Clairvaux, possibly the most influential theologian of the era, and his work was twice condemned as heretical by church councils. He was so unpopular in his role as the abbot of the monastery of St-Gildas-de-Rhuys in Brittany that he had to flee following an attempt on his life. He moved to the great monastery of Cluny in Burgundy and then finally retired, by then a sick, elderly man, to the priory of St Marcel, near Chalon-sur-Saône, where he died in 1142.

His remains were taken discreetly to the Abbey of the Paraclete where Héloïse was abbess; on her death in 1164, she was interred alongside him. Their remains were reputedly transferred to Père Lachaise in 1817, though some dispute whether the bones of either of them actually lie there.

Love letters

Even while separated by their monastic vows and living many miles apart, Abélard and Héloïse kept in touch. In the 1130s, Abélard wrote a kind of memoir, the *Historia Calamitatum* (History of Misfortunes), which provides an intimate portrait of his life and their story. After reading this text, Héloïse initiated an exchange of letters with Abélard that reveal the complexity and challenges of their relationship.

These missives document Héloïse's continued desire for Abélard, in language that seems startling when used by a consecrated nun. People looking at her mode of dress and way of life might think her chaste, she wrote, but "they do not know the hypocrite I am". Héloïse stated that, even when attending Mass, "lewd visions" of the sex she had enjoyed with Abélard "take such a hold on my unhappy soul that my thoughts are on their wantonness instead of on prayers".

Héloïse's relatives assumed that Abélard had abandoned her – and took their revenge by having him attacked and castrated

ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN/TOPFOTO

Set in stone
Effigies of Abélard and Héloïse lie on the monument that purportedly houses their remains in Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris. Even today, nine centuries after they met, countless visitors flock to their supposed tomb

Such passages have captured countless readers' imaginations and empathy over the centuries, beginning almost immediately. The 12th-century historian Otto of Freising alludes to Abélard's castration in his *Deeds of Barbarossa*, so the story must have made it at least as far as Germany.

The lovers' fame waxed and waned through the later Middle Ages; they weren't mentioned in Dante's c1321 discussion of sinful lovers, but Chaucer included a passing reference to Héloïse in the Wife of Bath's Prologue in the *Canterbury Tales* (written 1387–1400). His near contemporary Petrarch appears to have owned, read and annotated a copy of the couple's letters and Abélard's *Historia Calamitatum*.

In some ways, Héloïse sounds more like the second-wave feminists of the 1960s than her contemporaries

Resurgent fascination

The popularity of their story then surged again in the 17th and 18th centuries. In 1717, English poet Alexander Pope published *Eloisa to Abelard*, recounting the story from Héloïse's perspective. That poem's passionate emotions – in it, Héloïse declares herself "the slave of love and man" – struck a chord with the reading public, and it was translated into several languages.

The French painter Bernard d'Agesci's *Lady Reading the Letters of Heloise and Abelard* (c1780) shows a young woman swooning, breasts part-bared, at the romance of that correspondence. D'Agesci's Swiss contemporary Angelica Kauffmann painted the moment of the ill-fated couple's parting, both dressed rather anachronistically in the height of Renaissance fashion. And the tale continues to inspire creators today: Héloïse and Abélard are referenced in an episode of *The Sopranos*, and appear as lustful marionettes in the 1999 film *Being John Malkovich*.

Today, a quick online search yields references to their tale being "one of history's most passionate and romantic true love stories" and one of the "top 10 most torrid love affairs ever" – a "high-stakes romance" full of "grandeur".

But should we have reservations about this kind of framing? We should certainly be wary about presenting the story as a simple romance. Rather, it's a complex tale that raises many questions about how different kinds of relationships – romantic, sexual, familial, intellectual – worked in the Middle Ages.

It is true that most people who have been in love might empathise with Abélard's description of how, when alone with Héloïse,

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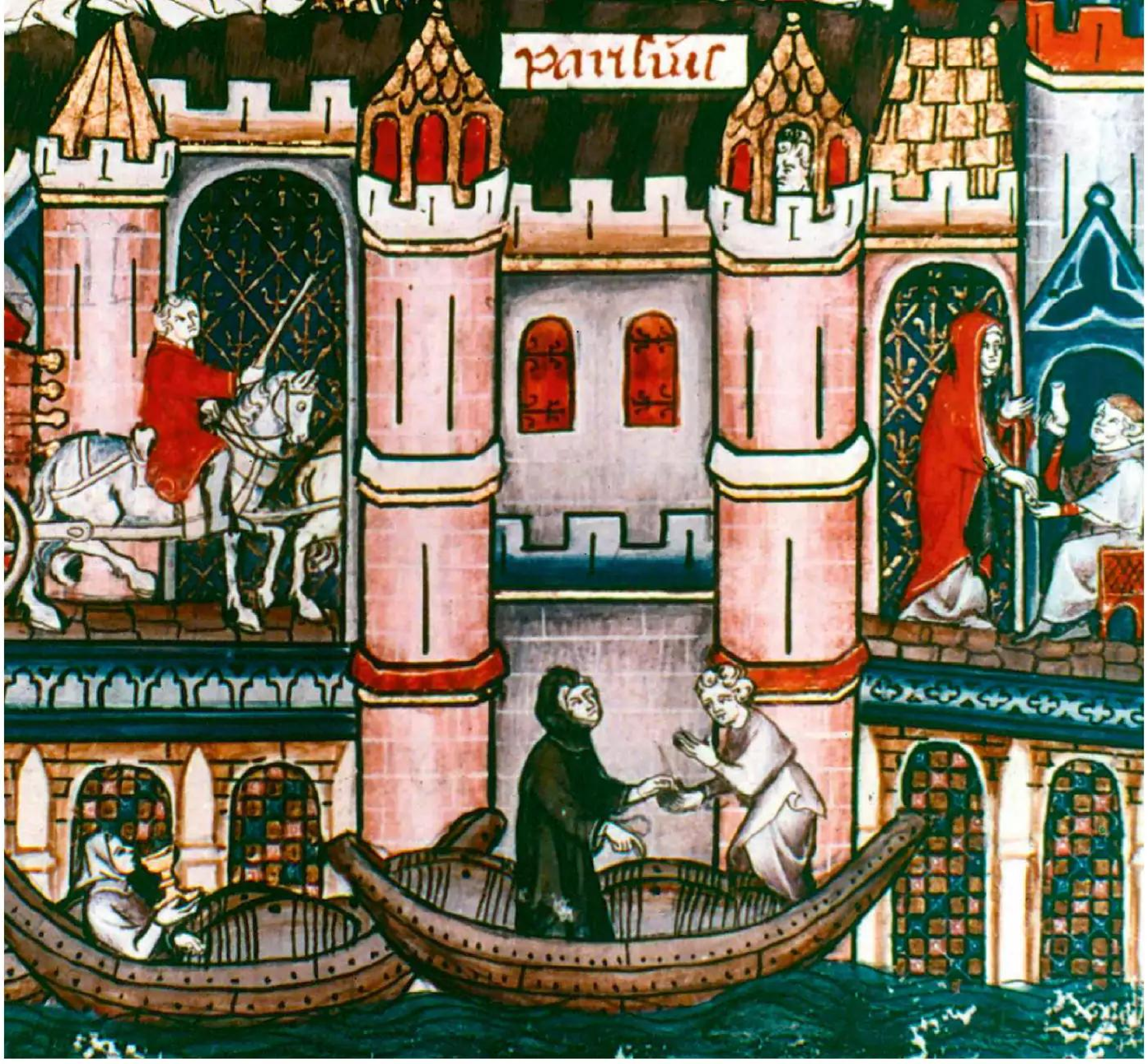
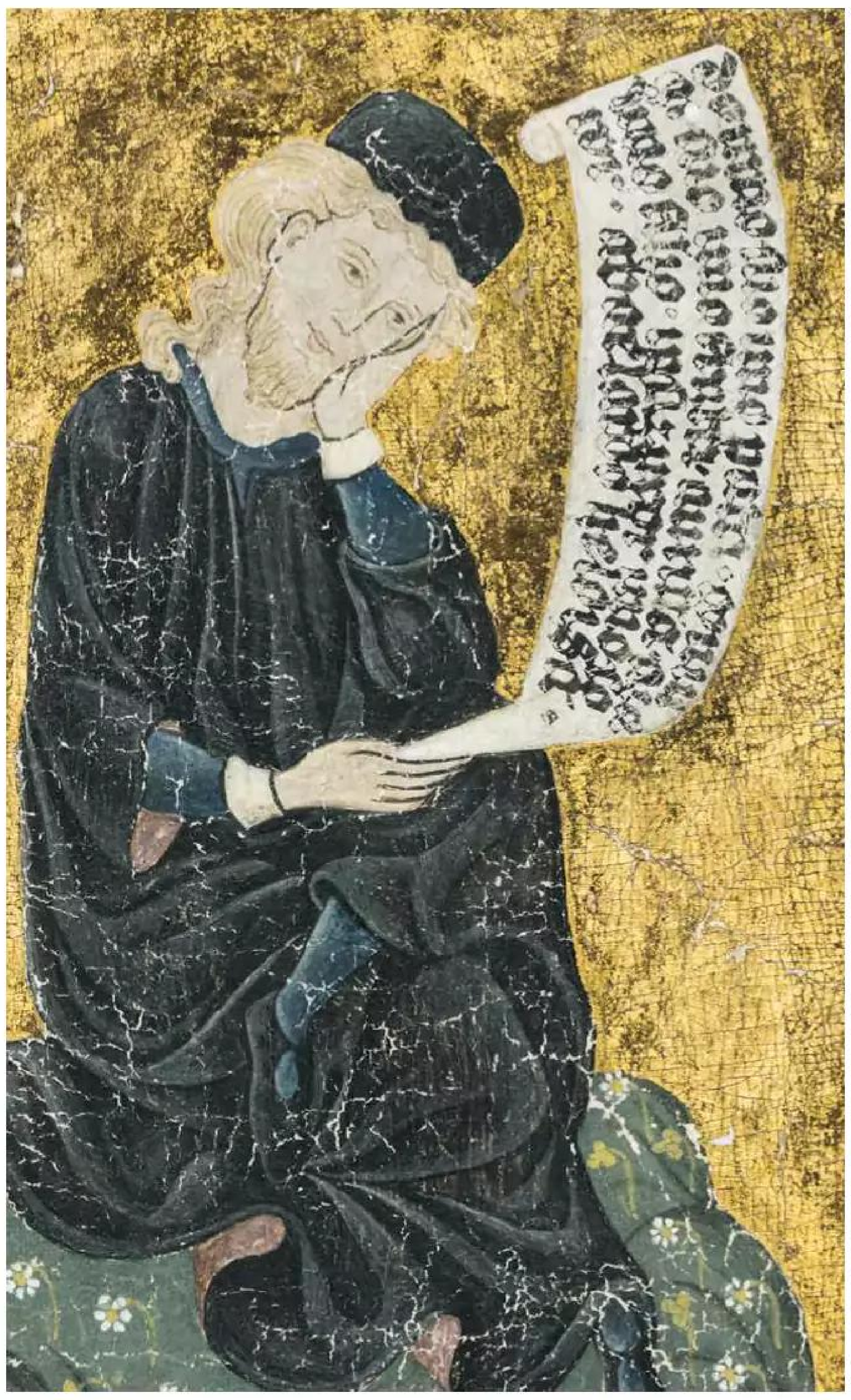


Medieval metropolis Traffic and trade in the bustling streets and waterways of Paris are depicted in this early 14th-century illustration. It was at her uncle's home in the centre of the city that Héloïse demonstrated her intelligence – and met Abélard



Man of letters A 14th-century painting shows Abélard reading a document. He wrote several influential and sometimes controversial texts

"more words of love than of our reading passed between us, and more kissing than ideas". He relished each moment he spent with her, and was irritated by every duty that took him away from her.

But most people would surely struggle to understand how such a lover could, as he professed, sometimes beat Héloïse so that no one would suspect him of being attracted to her. He later wrote that his "blows were the marks not of anger but of the tender affection that is sweeter than any perfume".

Medieval European attitudes to relationships were in many ways quite different to those held today. There was no legal concept of domestic violence or spousal rape, and it is possible that no contemporary batted an eye at Abélard's description of beating his future wife until she was visibly bruised – not even Héloïse herself. She does not seem to have viewed the relationship as abusive, even after years had passed and she was a powerful abbess with social standing of her own.

We do Héloïse a disservice if we see her only as a passive victim; her intelligence and leadership abilities make her a significant historical figure in her own right. She never claimed to be a feminist role model –she only ever claimed to be a woman in love.

Equally, we cannot ignore that Héloïse was raised in a society that encouraged her to think of women as subservient, just as Abélard was raised in one that shrugged at the beating of women. Look at the language she uses in her letters to Abélard: he is her husband, her father, her master; she is his wife, his daughter, his slave. In one famous punning line, she writes that she would rather be his whore (*meretrix*) than an empress (*imperatrix*). (Abélard, in contrast, staidly addresses his letters to his "dearly beloved sister in Christ".)

Troubling tension

There is an unavoidable tension inherent in telling this story in the 21st century. From one angle, Héloïse is a woman who defies societal convention for the man she loves. She writes that she prefers "love to wedlock and freedom to chains" – a very uncommon assertion from a woman in the 12th century. She rejects the idea that their relationship was sinful. "Wholly guilty though I am," she writes, "I am also… wholly innocent" because "it is not the deed but the intention of the doer which makes the crime."

Héloïse compares marriage to sex work, and says that any woman who marries for economic security "would be ready to prostitute herself to a richer man, if she could". In some ways, she sounds more like the second-wave feminists of the 1960s than her contemporaries. Should we praise the couple's relationship as a testament to how people can choose love, affection and passion in a society not structured to allow for it?

Seen from another angle, though, Héloïse continually defined herself in relationship to Abélard and his wants, and always put herself in the lesser position. If a friend today told us that their partner alone had "the power to make me sad, to bring me happiness or comfort", or said that they were "the sole possessor of my body and my will alike", might we find such attitudes unhealthily codependent?

Let us return to Père Lachaise for one last glimpse at Abélard and Héloïse's monument with these issues in mind. In an earlier age, devotees sought mementoes more intimate and more grotesque than the modern celebrity autograph or selfie. Alexandre Lenoir, the archaeologist who spearheaded the removal of the couple's remains to Paris in the 1810s, was happy to parcel out fragments of their skeletons to those whose favour he sought. One was given part of Abélard's jaw; another received a tooth and a finger from Héloïse's skeleton. There has always been an appetite for a piece of the past, especially of the doomed-but-devoted-love variety.

Perhaps today, though, admirers of these star-crossed lovers might be willing to take something less tangible but more important: an understanding that history teaches us the enduring complexity of human relationships and the paradoxical nature of love. H

Yvonne Seale is associate professor of history at the State University of New York at Geneseo

Listen to Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss the story of Abélard and Héloïse on an episode of **In Our Time** at *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p003k9c7*

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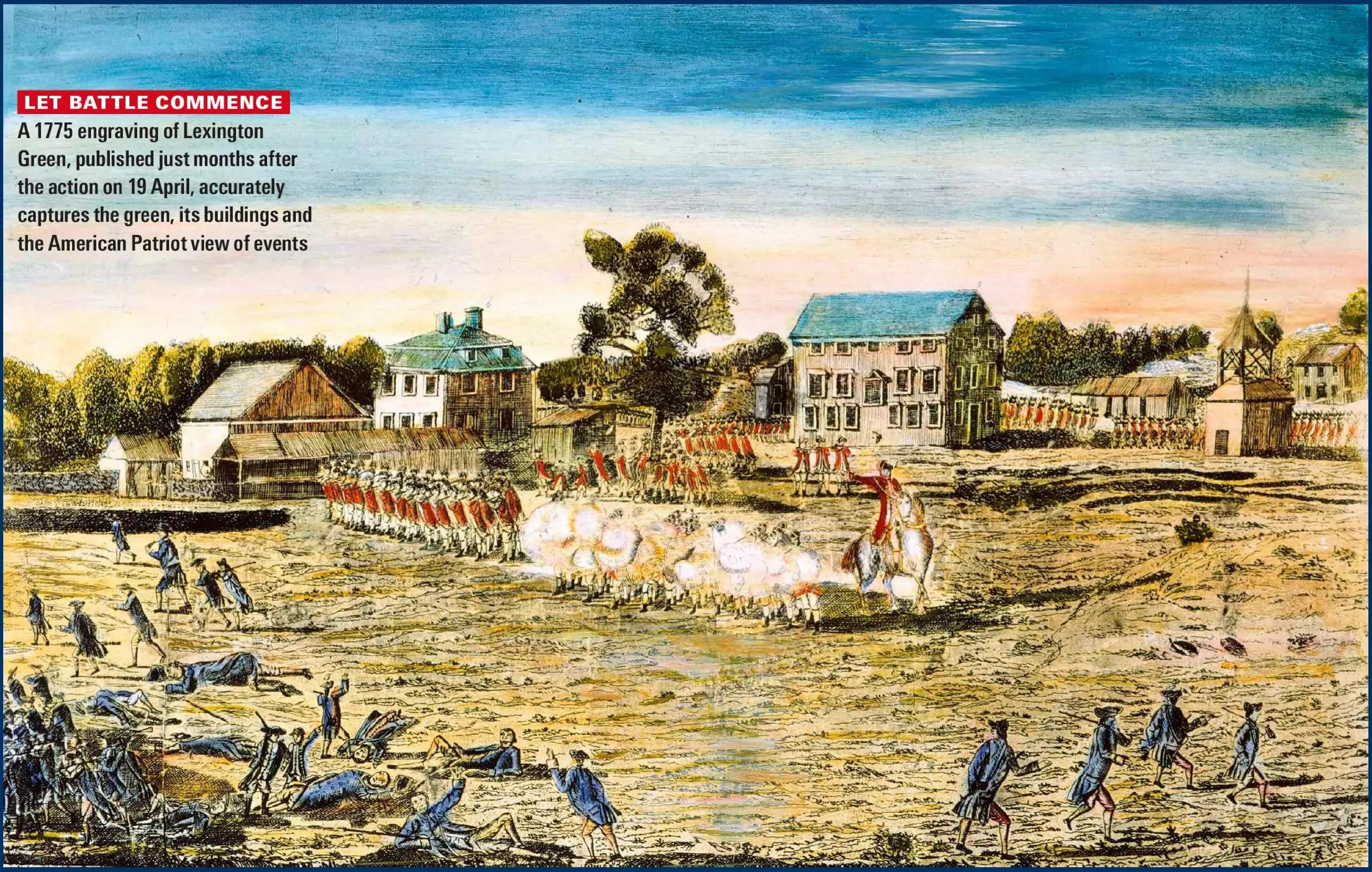
It was the shot heard around the world...

A dramatic later depiction of British Redcoats under fire during their retreat from Concord to Boston on 19 April 1775. The events of that day precipitated a propaganda battle that would shape the course of the American Revolutionary War

But who fired it?

It's 250 years since British troops clashed with American colonists at Lexington and Concord. **George Goodwin** reveals how one fateful day triggered the American Revolutionary War – and sparked a ferocious race to blame the other side

TOPFOTO



LET BATTLE COMMENCE
A 1775 engraving of Lexington Green, published just months after the action on 19 April, accurately captures the green, its buildings and the American Patriot view of events

TOPFOTO

At 5am on 19 April 1775, two groups of British subjects faced each other across the town common of Lexington, 11 miles north-west of Boston, Massachusetts. One group was composed of local inhabitants, militiamen who would fight as Patriots. The other was of red-coated British troops under the immediate command of Marine Major John Pitcairn. The militiamen were certainly not there by chance: the plans of General Gage, the British governor of Massachusetts, had been revealed to his opponents.

Simmering tensions over London's repeated assertions of control over its American colonies, dating back to the 1760s, had brought the two sides to this point. After a tense standoff, the Redcoats and militiamen traded fire. At the end of this brief but fateful exchange, eight Patriots lay dead.

The two sides traded fire and at the end of this brief exchange, eight Patriots lay dead

A bloody retreat

Major Pitcairn and his men were just the vanguard of a 1,500-strong force under the overall command of Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith. The colonel had a clear mission that day: to seize Patriot-held cannon and munitions in nearby Concord, the main town in Middlesex County and the centre for mobilising the county militia regiments of 6,000 men. And so, shortly after the clash at Lexington, Smith's Redcoats pushed on to Concord.

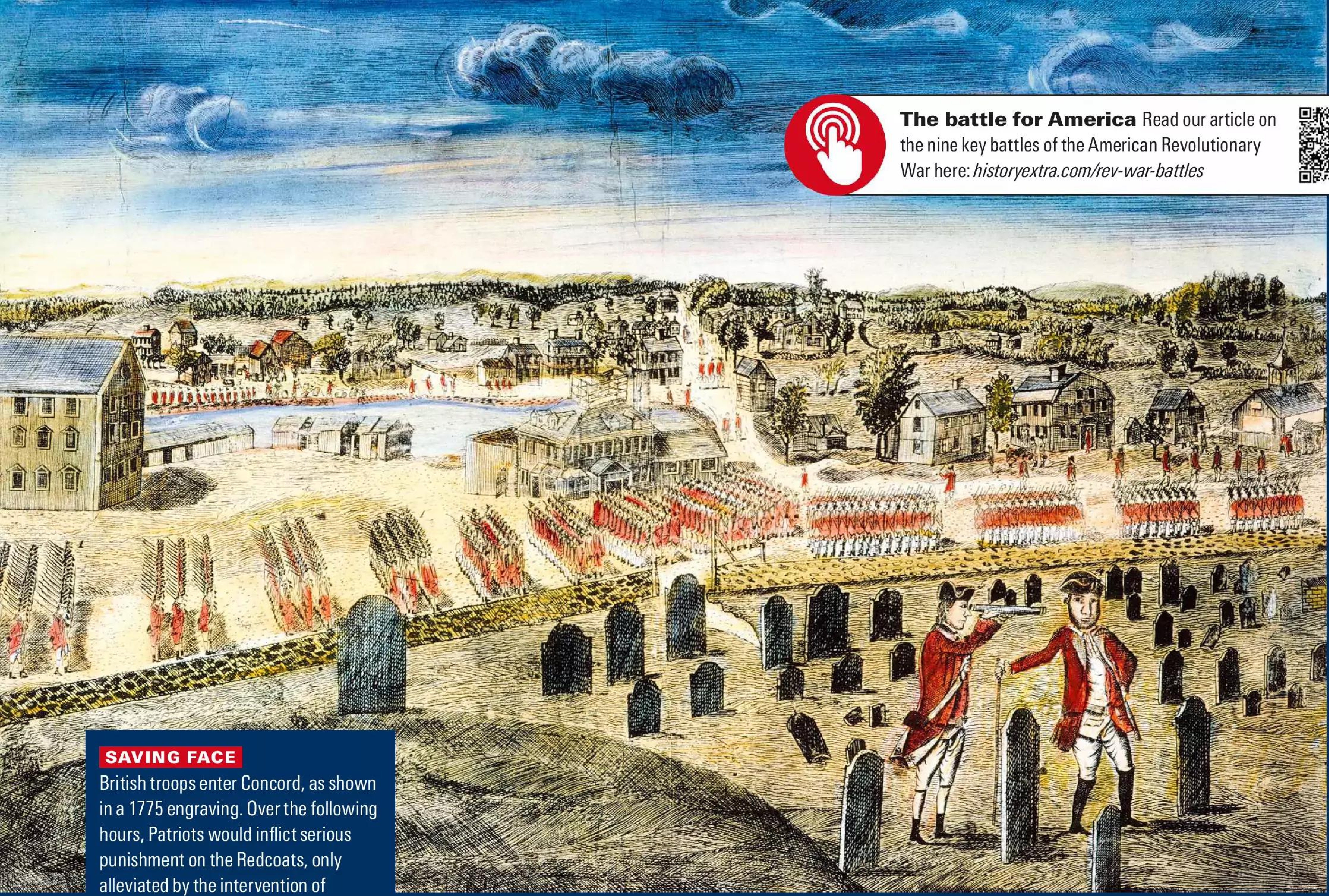
Hostilities were resumed at Concord's North Bridge at around 9am, shortly after the British had undertaken a largely fruitless search for weaponry to the west of the town. The intensity of the engagement now increased: colonist numbers had grown to around 400, with the local men now joined from surrounding areas by militia that included the elite Minutemen, whose name reflected their timely readiness for action.

After both sides temporarily disengaged, Smith's force reassembled in Concord itself and, at noon, continued along the road back to Boston. The retreat would last until after 7pm, with the regulars harried in a series of defensive engagements with an ever-increasing and finally vastly greater number of colonists. Among the Patriots were the Minutemen of the Danvers Company, who arrived from a full 30 miles away. They were in the thick of the action, as witnessed by the fact that seven of them were killed. That so many had come so far, and in such numbers, can be credited to Paul Revere's pre-planned organisation of dozens of other riders to spread the alert when the alarm was raised, which had begun the previous evening.

Redcoat casualties continued to mount during the day. In fact it wasn't until mid-afternoon – when artillery under the command of Brigadier Earl Percy arrived from Boston – that they were given some protection. But for the organisational ability and cannon of Lord Percy, supported over the last few miles by the firepower of British ships anchored in the bay opposite Charlestown, the army's casualty figures would have been far greater.

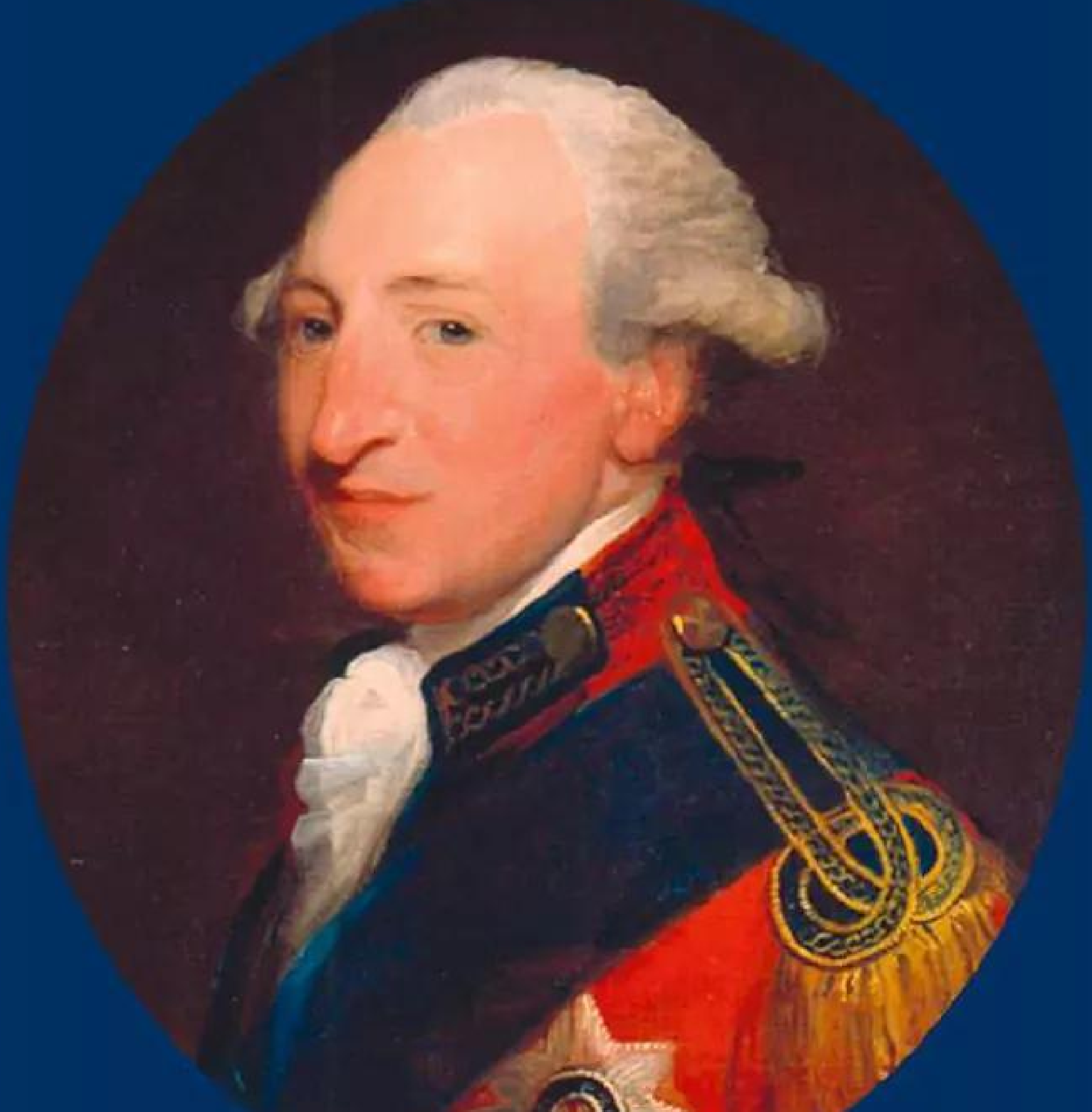
As it was, according to the American Battlefield Trust,

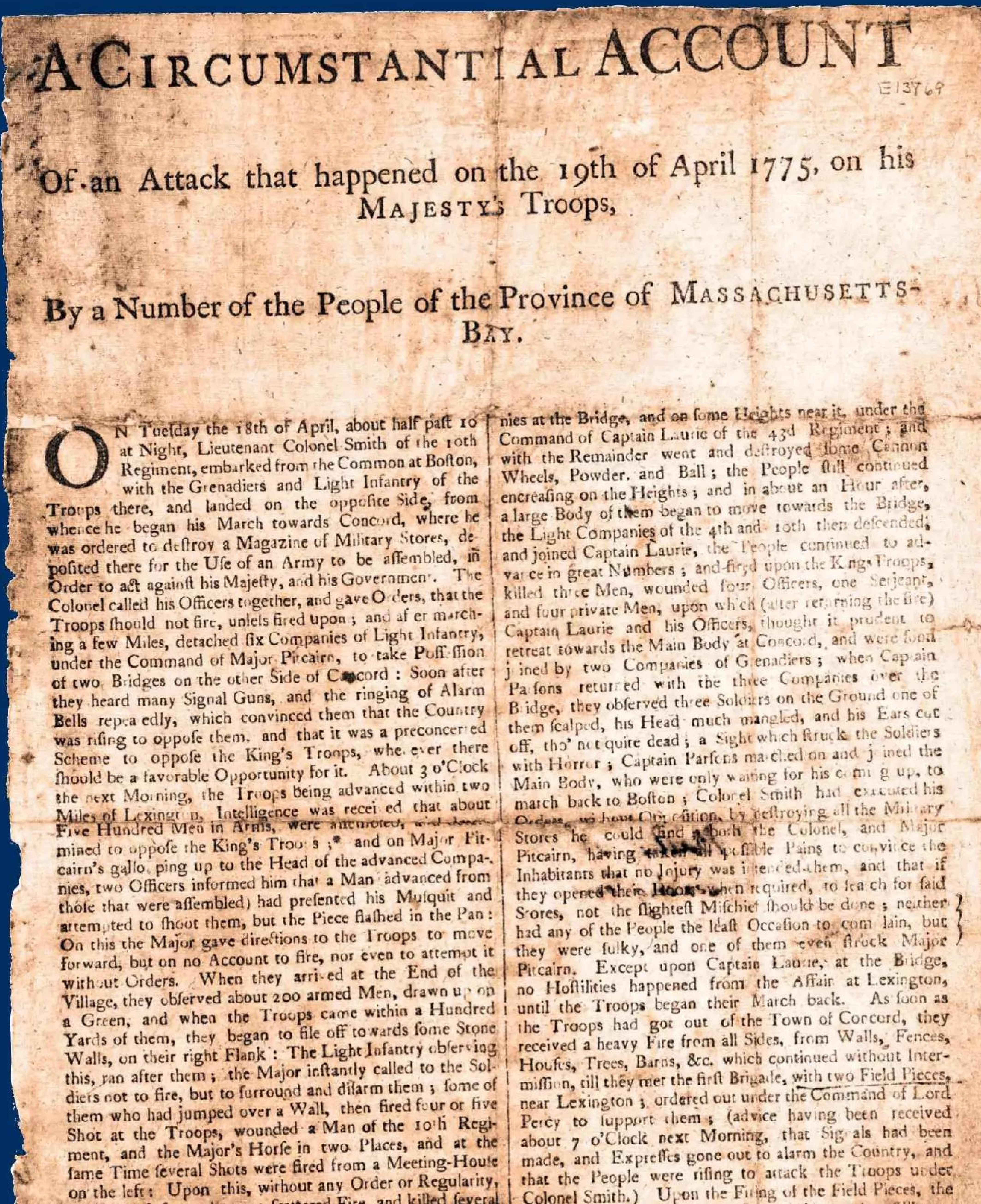
The battle for America Read our article on the nine key battles of the American Revolutionary War here: *historyextra.com/rev-war-battles*



SAVING FACE

British troops enter Concord, as shown in a 1775 engraving. Over the following hours, Patriots would inflict serious punishment on the Redcoats, only alleviated by the intervention of Brigadier Earl Percy (below)





A CIRCUMSTANTIAL ACCOUNT

E13769

Of an Attack that happened on the 19th of April 1775, on his MAJESTY's Troops,

By a Number of the People of the Province of MASSACHUSETTS-BAY.

ON Tueſday the 18th of April, about half paſt 10 at Night, Lieutenant Colonel Smith of the 10th Regiment, embarked from the Common at Boſton, with the Grenadiers and Light Infantry of the Troops there, and landed on the oppoſite Side, from whence he began his March towards Concord, where he was ordered to deſtroy a Magazine of Military Stores, depoſited there for the Uſe of an Army to be aſſembled, in Order to act againſt his Majeſty, and his Government. The Colonel called his Officers together, and gave Orders, that the Troops ſhould not fire, unleſs fired upon; and after marching a few Miles, detached ſix Companies of Light Infantry, under the Command of Major Pitcairn, to take Poſſeſſion of two Bridges on the other Side of Concord: Soon after they heard many Signal Guns, and the ringing of Alarm Bells repeatedly, which convinced them that the Country was riſing to oppoſe them, and that it was a preconcerted Scheme to oppoſe the King's Troops, whenever there ſhould be a favorable Opportunity for it. About 3 o'Clock the next Morning, the Troops being advanced within two Miles of Lexington, Intelligence was received that about Five Hundred Men in Arms, were aſſembled, and determined to oppoſe the King's Troops;* and on Major Pitcairn's galloping up to the Head of the advanced Companies, two Officers informed him that a Man advanced from thoſe that were aſſembled) had preſented his Muſquit and attempted to ſhoot them, but the Piece flaſhed in the Pan: On this the Major gave directions to the Troops to move forward, but on no Account to fire, nor even to attempt it without Orders. When they arrived at the End of the Village, they obſerved about 200 armed Men, drawn up on a Green, and when the Troops came within a Hundred Yards of them, they began to file off towards ſome Stone Walls, on their right Flank: The Light Infantry obſerving this, ran after them; the Major inſtantly called to the Soldiers not to fire, but to ſurround and diſarm them; ſome of them who had jumped over a Wall, then fired four or five Shot at the Troops, wounded a Man of the 10th Regiment, and the Major's Horſe in two Places, and at the ſame Time ſeveral Shots were fired from a Meeting-Houſe on the left: Upon this, without any Order or Regularity, Scattered Fire, and killed ſeveral

nies at the Bridge, and on ſome Heights near it, under the Command of Captain Laurie of the 43d Regiment; and with the Remainder went and deſtroyed ſome Cannon Wheels, Powder, and Ball; the People ſtill continued encreaſing on the Heights; and in about an Hour after, a large Body of them began to move towards the Bridge, the Light Companies of the 4th and 10th then deſcended and joined Captain Laurie, the People continued to advance in great Numbers; and fired upon the King's Troops, killed three Men, wounded four Officers, one Serjeant, and four private Men, upon which (after returning the fire) Captain Laurie and his Officers, thought it prudent to retreat towards the Main Body at Concord, and were ſoon joined by two Companies of Grenadiers; when Captain Parſons returned with the three Companies over the Bridge, they obſerved three Soldiers on the Ground one of them ſcalped, his Head much mangled, and his Ears cut off, tho' not quite dead; a Sight which ſtruck the Soldiers with Horror; Captain Parſons marched on and joined the Main Body, who were only waiting for his coming up, to march back to Boſton; Colonel Smith had executed his Orders, without Oppoſition, by deſtroying all the Military Stores he could find; both the Colonel, and Major Pitcairn, having taken all poſſible Pains to convince the Inhabitants that no Injury was intended them, and that if they opened their Doors when required, to ſearch for ſaid Stores, not the ſlighteſt Miſchief ſhould be done; neither had any of the People the leaſt Occaſion to complain, but they were ſulky, and one of them even ſtruck Major Pitcairn. Except upon Captain Laurie, at the Bridge, no Hoſtilities happened from the Affair at Lexington, until the Troops began their March back. As ſoon as the Troops had got out of the Town of Concord, they received a heavy Fire from all Sides, from Walls, Fences, Houſes, Trees, Barns, &c. which continued without Intermiſſion, till they met the firſt Brigade, with two Field Pieces, near Lexington; ordered out under the Command of Lord Percy to ſupport them; (advice having been received about 7 o'Clock next Morning, that Signals had been made, and Expreſſes gone out to alarm the Country, and that the People were riſing to attack the Troops under Colonel Smith.) Upon the Firing of the Field Pieces, the

MINORITY VIEW

An original copy of *A Circumstantial Account*, which offered the British authorities' version of who fired first at Lexington. This broadside largely fell on deaf ears

TOPFOTO/ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN

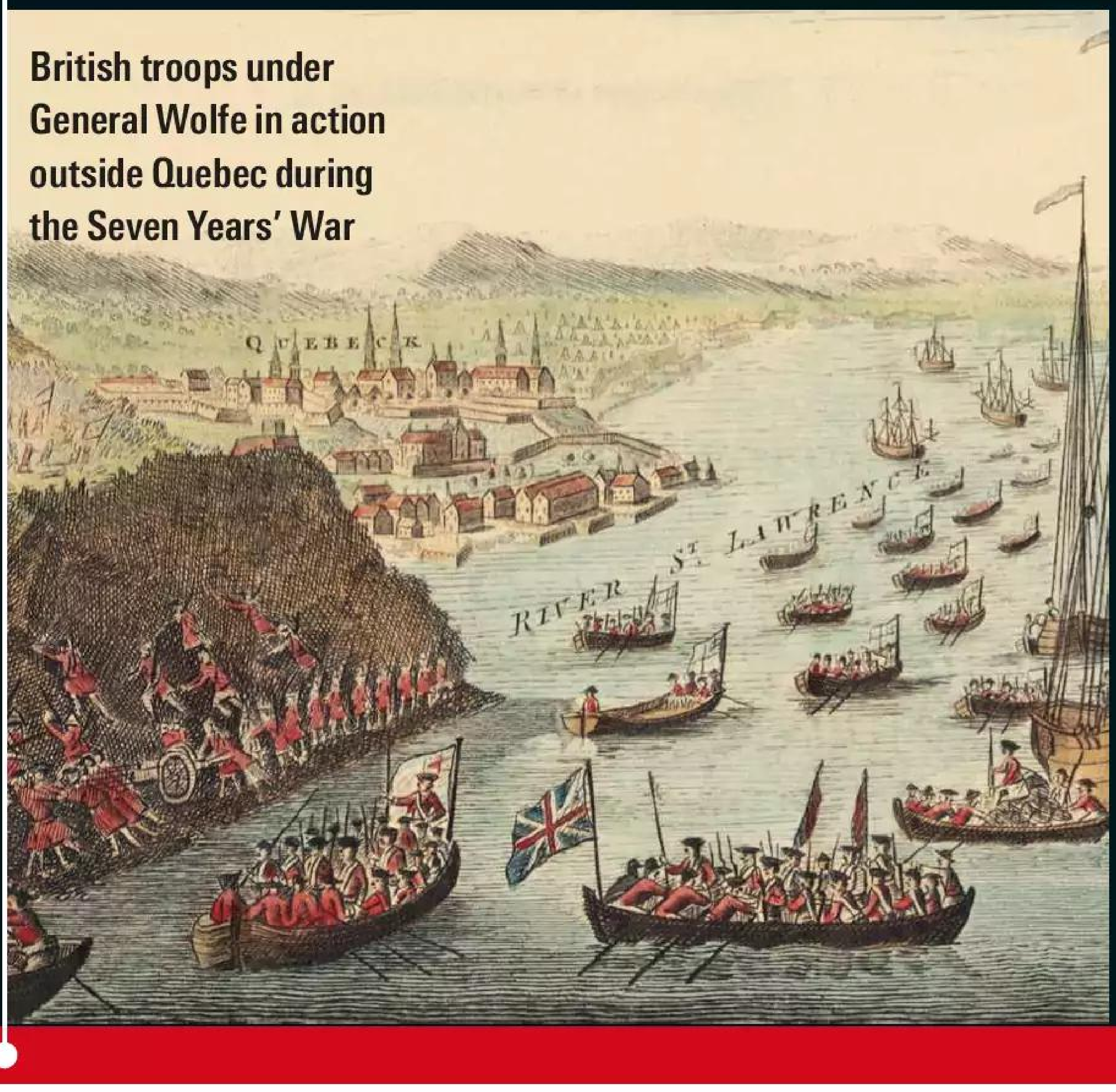
TIMELINE

THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

How tensions between Britain and its American colonies descended into conflict

1756–63

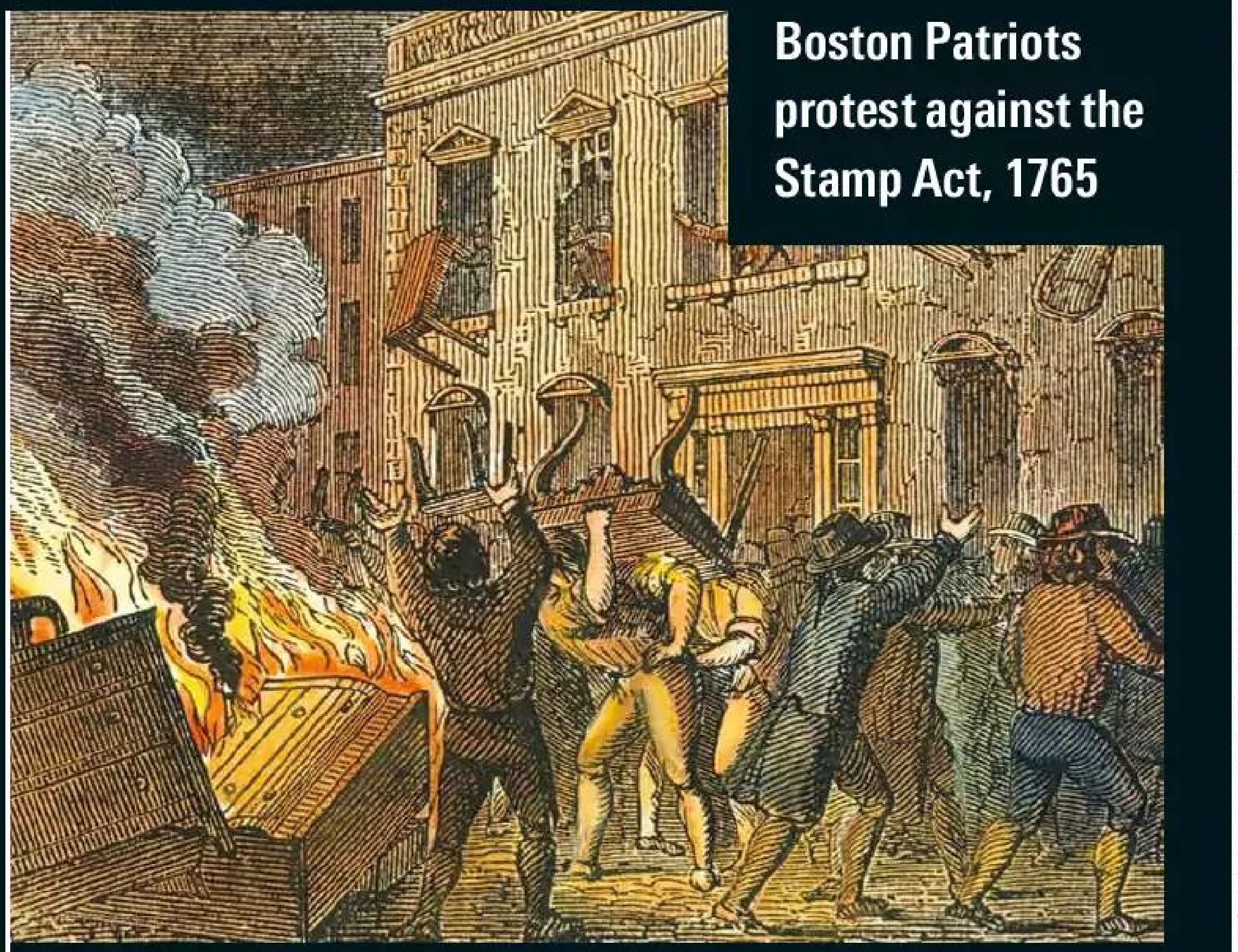
Britain's capture of Canada during the Seven Years' War ends the French threat to Britain's colonies in New England: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut



British troops under General Wolfe in action outside Quebec during the Seven Years' War

April 1764

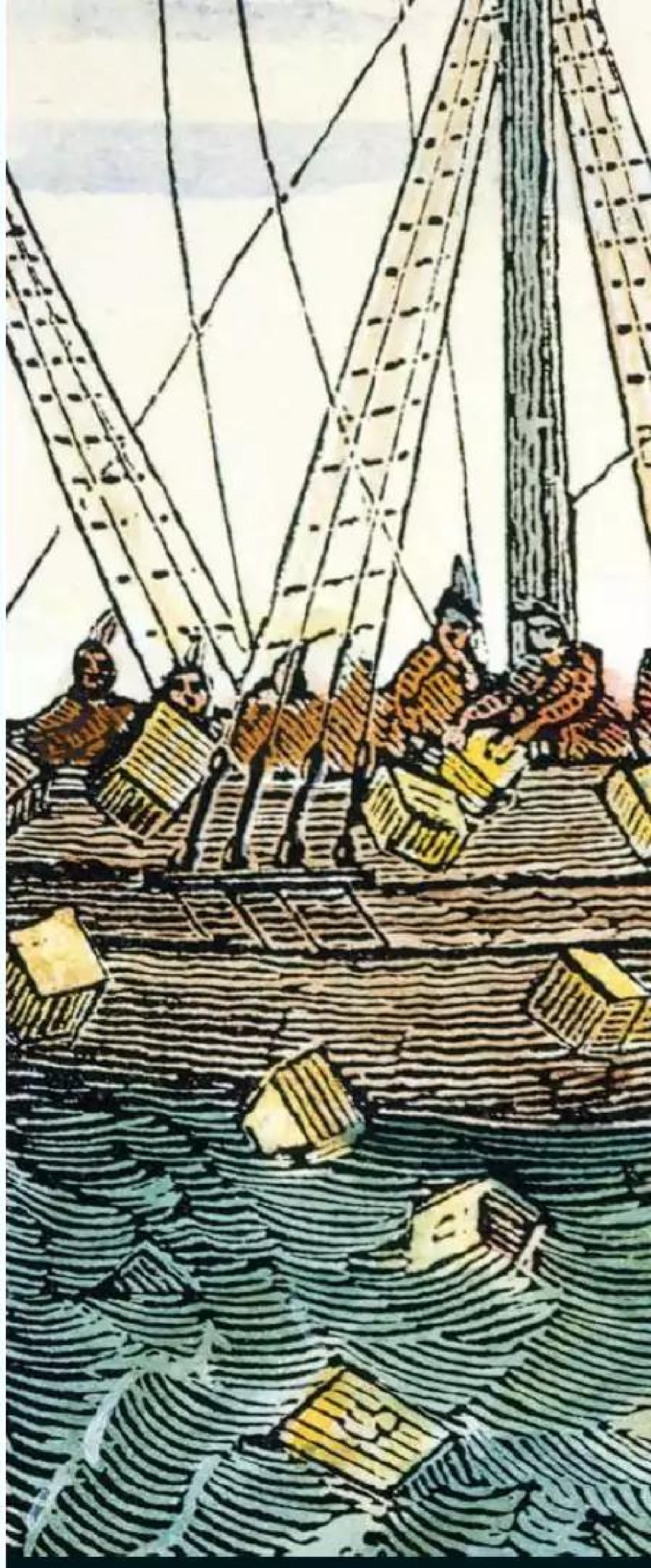
The British pass the Sugar Act, aimed at ending the smuggling of sugar and molasses from the French and Dutch West Indies. The act contravenes the **Americans' chartered rights to tax themselves**



Boston Patriots protest against the Stamp Act, 1765

1765

The British introduction of the Stamp Act – a tax on everything printed – **is violently opposed across the colonies.** The resistance is fanned by newspaper reporting and organised by the 'Sons of Liberty'



1765–74

Boston becomes a centre of resistance to Britain's government. The city's radicals become identified as **Patriots and over time take control of the colony's house of representatives**, its governing council, its courts and its militia

casualties amounted to a full fifth of Smith's Redcoats, with an estimated 73 killed, 174 wounded and a further 53 missing or captured. In contrast, the casualties of the Patriots – 49 killed, 39 wounded and only five missing or captured – were far lower. From now on, the British army based at Boston would be contained in the town itself and to that proportion of the surrounding area that could be protected by its military and naval firepower. There could be no doubt as to who had won the battle.

Furious propaganda war

But there remained a question of immense importance. Quite simply, which of the two sides had been the aggressor? Who had fired the first shot? In an era in which the influence of newspapers was growing exponentially, the answer would sway opinion on both sides of the Atlantic.

For the Patriots, there was no doubt that the British had been the aggressors. Pitcairn, they said, had shouted: "Disperse you rebels – damn you, throw down your arms and disperse." Upon which, "The troops huzzaed and immediately one or two officers discharged their pistols, which were instantaneously followed by the firing of four or five of the soldiers, then there seemed to be a general discharge from the whole body. Eight of our men were killed and nine wounded."

In 1837, poet Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'Concord Hymn' would capture the American Patriots' spirit of resistance with the phrase "the shot heard round the world". In 1775, the concerns of the Patriot leadership were more prosaic. They needed the Redcoats to be blamed for events at Lexington and Concord, and for Patriots to be seen as victims rather than aggressors.

On the British side, Governor Gage needed the opposite to be believed. And so, within days of the battle, the governor's office produced a one-page broadside entitled *A Circumstantial Account of an Attack that Happened on the 19th April, on his Majesty's Troops*. Essentially a compilation of reports given to Gage by Smith, Pitcairn and Percy, it stressed how, in Smith's words, "the troops [had been told they] should not fire unless fired upon" at Lexington. Furthermore, as the troops moved forward, Pitcairn had reinforced this with the message "on no account to fire, not even to attempt it without orders". Finally, when faced by 200 men on Lexington Green, Pitcairn gave the instruction "not to fire".

Partly due to the turmoil in the town and partly because of the opposition of the majority of its newspapers to the British account, Gage was not able to publish his *Circumstantial Account* in the Boston press. Even the loyal *Massachusetts Gazette* and *Boston Newsletter* declared, albeit on the very next day after the running battle, "that we are not able to collect anything consistent or regular, and cannot therefore with certainty give our

Following the retreat from Concord, the British Army based in Boston was penned into the city

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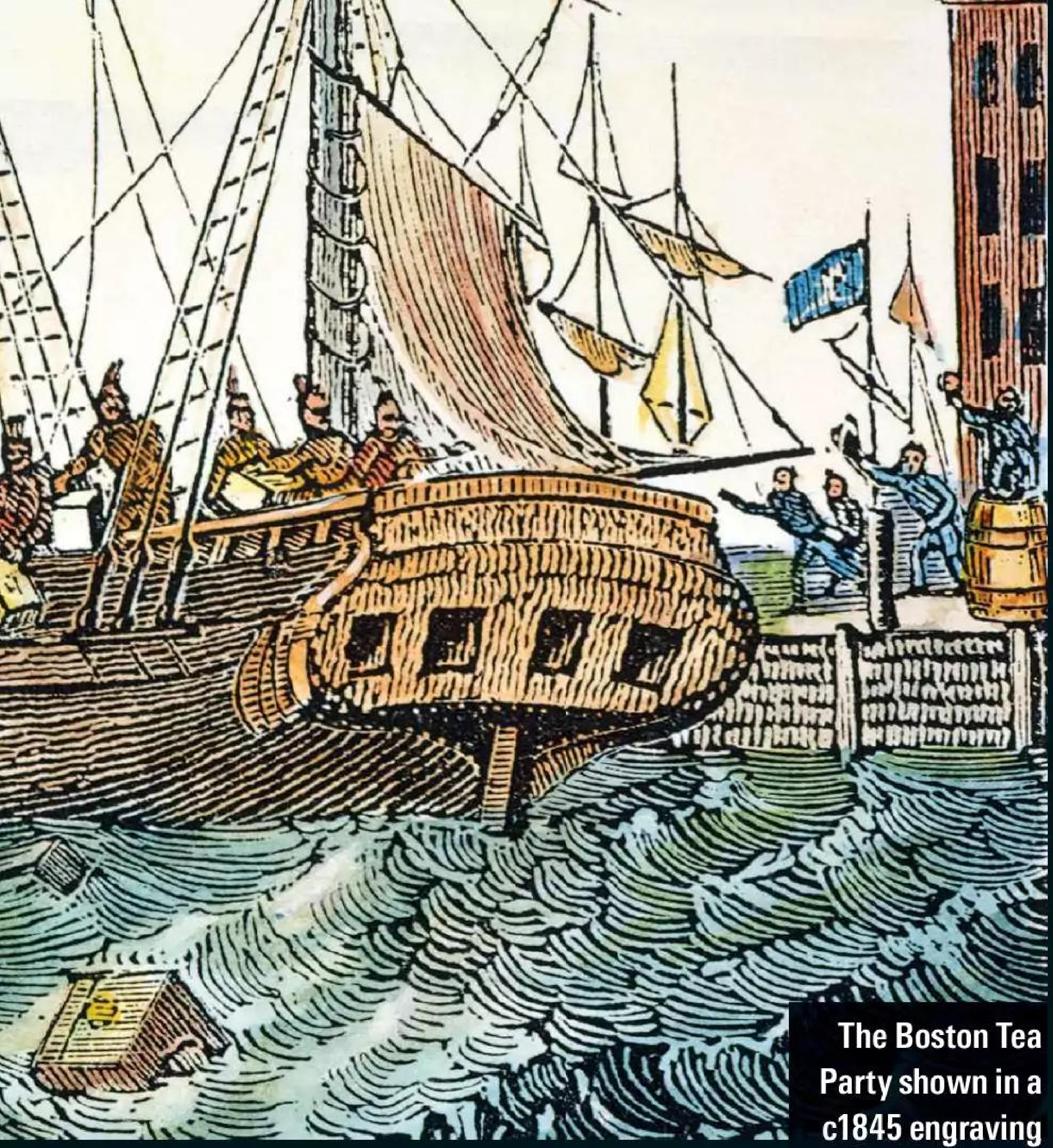
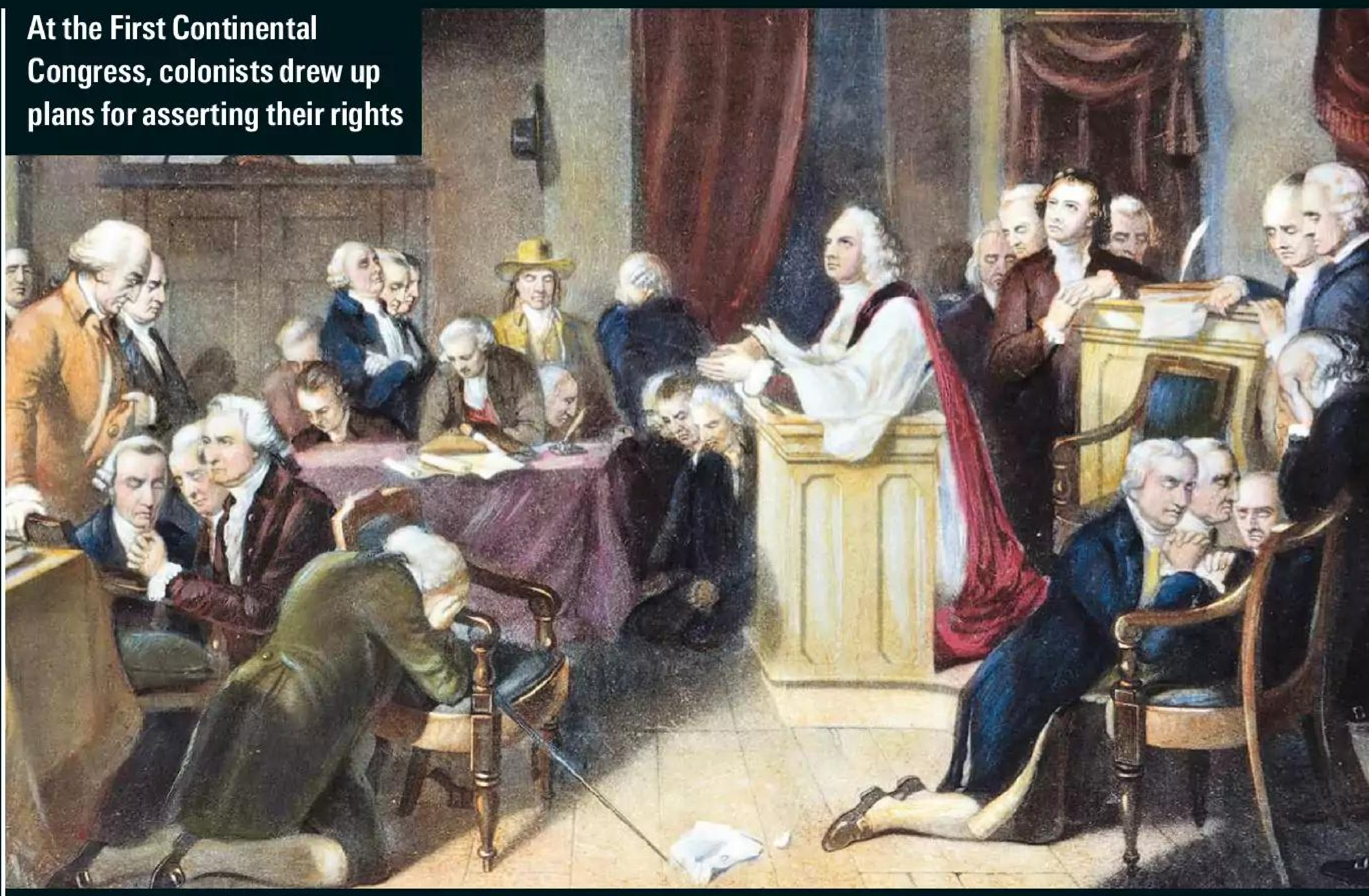


The Boston Tea Party shown in a c1845 engraving



At the First Continental Congress, colonists drew up plans for asserting their rights

16 December 1773

American protesters demonstrate their fury at the Tea Act of 1773 by **throwing chests of East India Company tea into Boston harbour**. The 'Boston Tea Party' ratchets up tensions between Britain and the Thirteen Colonies

1774

In response to the Boston Tea Party, the British introduce a series of **Coercive Acts that suspend Massachusetts' trade** and its entire legal and institutional framework. Boston is now under military control

September 1774

The First Continental Congress convenes in Philadelphia. Its aim is to **repair the colonies' fractured relationship with Britain**, but also to assert colonists' rights

26 February 1775

British forces descend on Salem in Massachusetts with the aim of seizing military stores. After a stand-off with local Patriots, the British retreat without a shot being fired. This peaceful resolution would not be repeated in Lexington two months later

readers any further account of this shocking introduction to all the miseries of a Civil War". But Gage hardly did much better with the papers outside Boston and beyond. Whereas the vast majority of the Thirteen Colonies' 37 newspapers would support the colonists' report, only five ran Gage's *Circumstantial Account*, with some also including critical comment. That said, Gage's primary audience lay across the Atlantic. Indeed, so keen was Gage to ensure that his account reached London before the colonists' version of events that he ordered all mail-carrying ships be searched for Patriot propaganda. None was found.

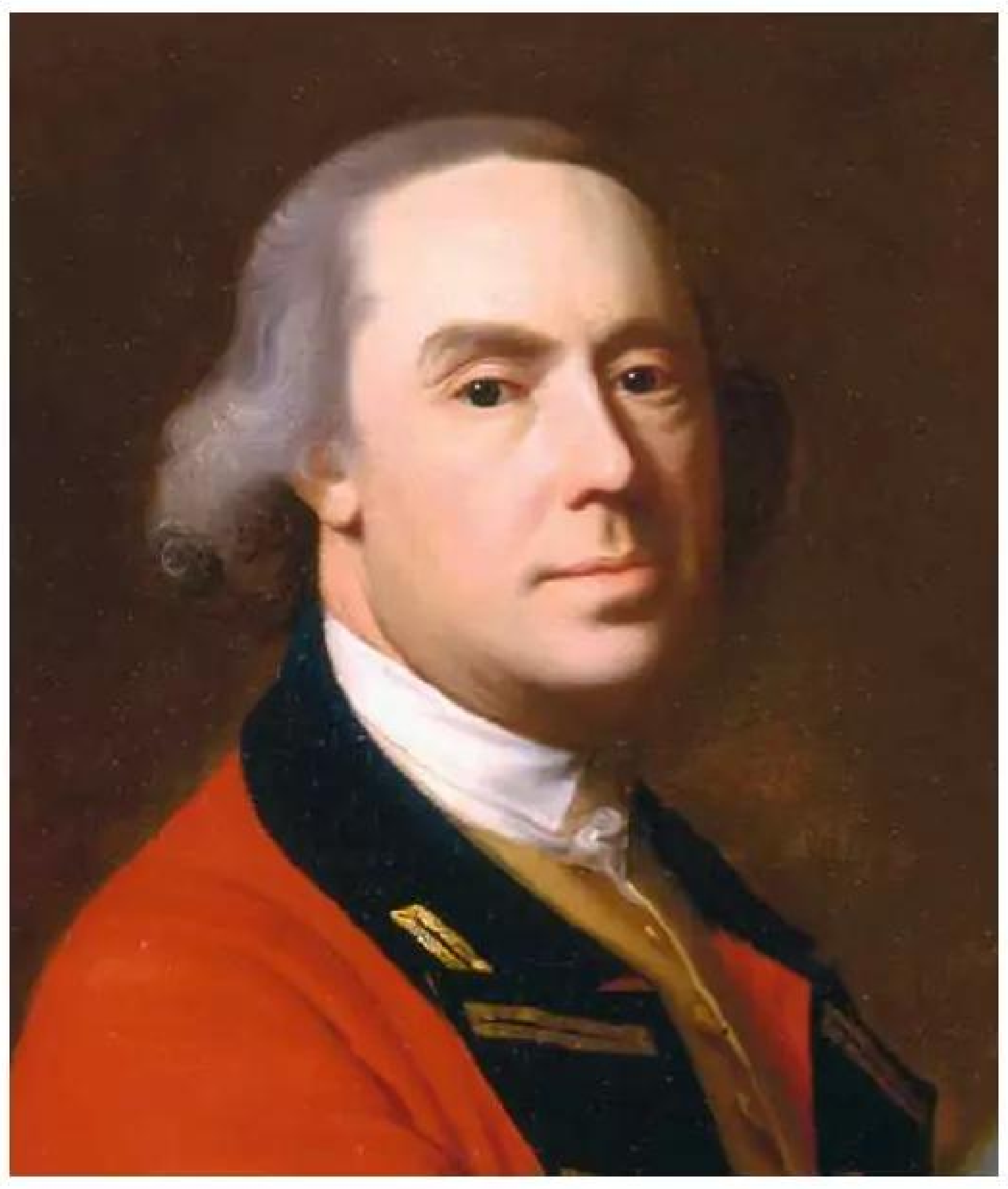
In contrast, Dr Joseph Warren, president of the revolutionary Massachusetts Provincial Congress, proceeded more slowly but also more surely, and took the time to assemble a full range of eyewitness reports. The vast majority of these were of course by dedicated Patriots, but there were also some from captured British soldiers.

By far the most important of these was from the wounded Lieutenant Edward Gould, an officer of the King's Own Regiment, whose account would have been widely seen as unimpeachable. Gould had been present at both Lexington and Concord and testified that the Redcoats opened fire at Concord. As for Lexington, he said he could not be certain that his own side had fired the first shot. However, his description of the Redcoats' aggressive posture and the way they had "rushed on shouting and huzzaing, previous to the firing, which was continued by our troops so long as any of the provincials were to be seen" exactly matched other witness statements – and, incidentally, contradicted Pitcairn's account.

Gould's words were presented as corroborative of other damning evidence that was first published as a condensed narrative report in the *Essex Gazette* of Salem on 25 April. The opening words of the report sum up its tone: "Last Wednesday, the 19th of April, the troops of his Britannic majesty commenced hostilities upon the people of this province, attended with circumstances of cruelty."

Race across the Atlantic

On 25 April, a brig named the *Sukey*, with Gage's full report on board, sailed for England. Yet Warren was not ready to follow suit, as local justices of the peace were still taking witness statements. These were to be added to the bundle of documents that would include the *Essex Gazette* account and a letter from the Massachusetts Provincial Congress addressed to "The inhabitants of Great Britain". All were delivered on 27 April to Captain John Derby of Salem, who was commissioned to take the information across the Atlantic. Warren also included a personal note of instructions to Derby which contained a PS that was anything but an afterthought: "You are to



Governor Thomas Gage ordered that all mail ships from America to Britain be searched for Patriot propaganda

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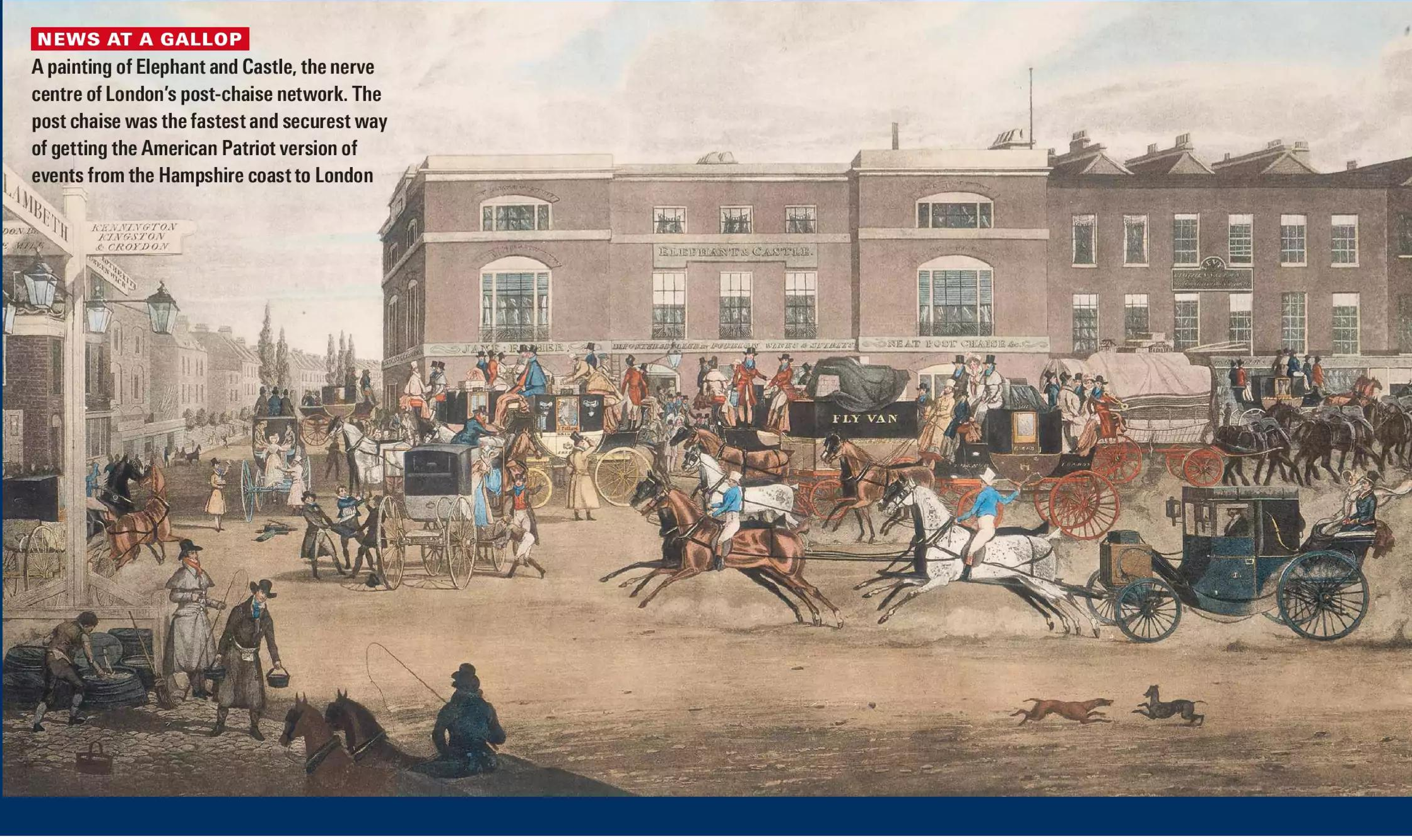


NEWS AT A GALLOP
A painting of Elephant and Castle, the nerve centre of London's post-chaise network. The post chaise was the fastest and securest way of getting the American Patriot version of events from the Hampshire coast to London

TOPFOTO

keep this order a profound secret from every person on Earth."

On the night of 28–29 April, with the conditions suitable for avoiding detection by the patrolling Royal Navy, Derby sailed the *Quero*, his family's fast trading yacht, out into the open sea.

A race across the Atlantic

The brig *Sukey* was a common type of maritime vessel used both by the navy and commercially for coastal trading as well as oceanic navigation. It took the standard six weeks to cross the Atlantic. In contrast, Derby's *Quero* was built for speed and completed the crossing and continued along the Channel as far as the Isle of Wight in less than a month. Surreptitiously landed ashore close to Southampton on the morning of Sunday 28 May, Derby hired the fastest (and most expensive) transport to London, the post chaise, and was in the capital by evening. There he reported to the Virginian Arthur Lee, who had recently succeeded Benjamin Franklin as Massachusetts' official London representative.

Warren's instructions were clear. They commanded that the sensational material "be immediately printed and dispersed through every town in England, and especially communicated to the lord mayor, aldermen and council of the City of London, that they make such order thereon as they may think proper".

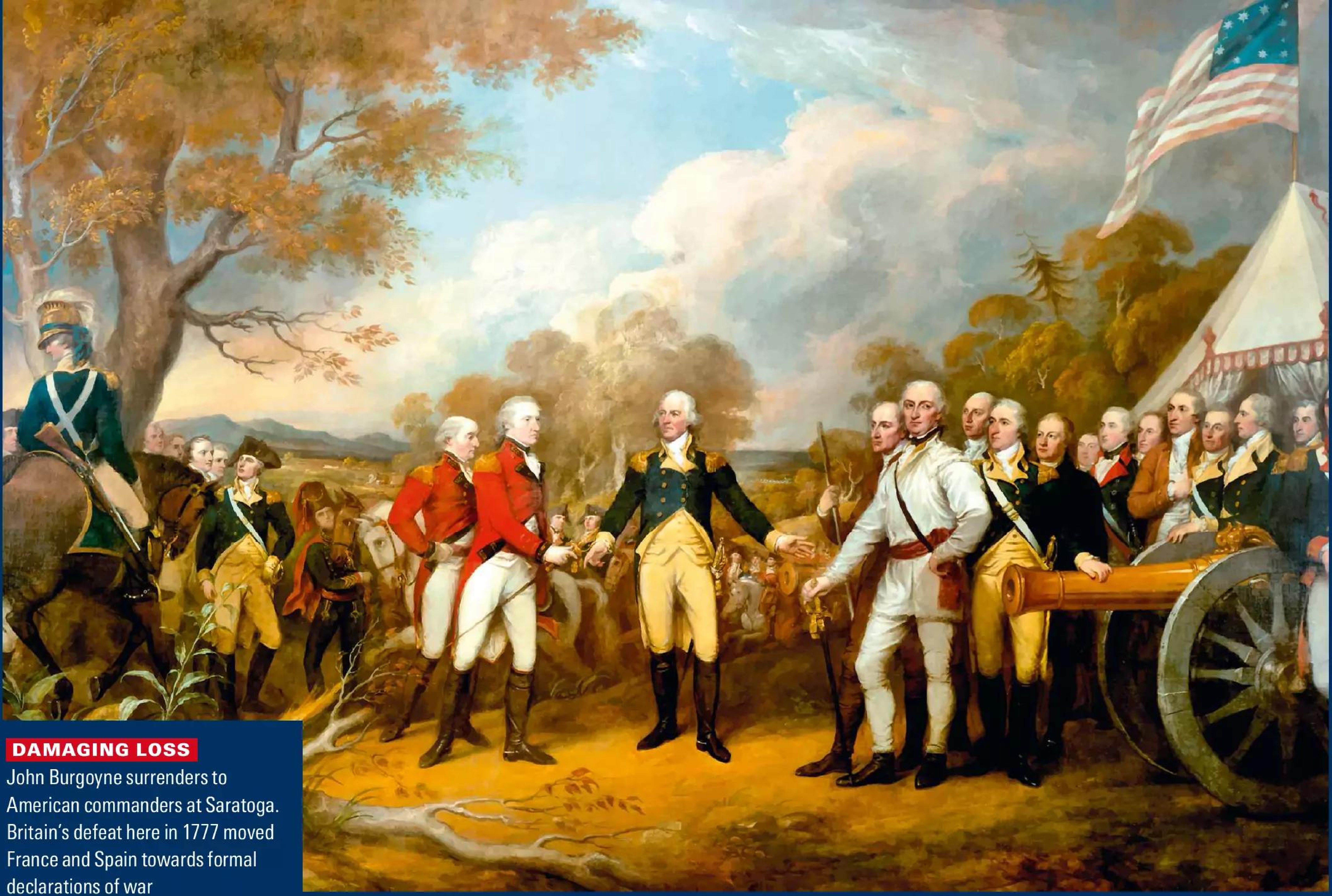
Lee was ideally placed to do this. He had extremely good newspaper contacts and knew exactly how to maximise press coverage, both in the capital and regions. As for the highly influential City of London, Lee was himself a sheriff and deputy to Lord Mayor John Wilkes, the radical who had joined the establishment and who was one of Lee's closest friends.

Knowing that Gage's official version had not arrived, Lee set about establishing the 'truth' of the matter with a two-part publishing coup. The very next day, Monday 29 May, Lee's favoured *London Evening Post* published a special 'extraordinary' edition. This gave full rein to most, but not all, of the Patriots' account. However, knowing that the secretary of state, Lord Dartmouth, would use the government's official *London Gazette* to attack the status and truth of the Patriots' published statements, Lee deliberately set out to negate him by designing a piece to run alongside Dartmouth's own in the following editions of the non-official newspapers.

As Dartmouth became increasingly angry at the perception of a "false impression upon people's minds", the *Sukey* – carrying Gage's report – still failed to arrive and the Patriot record of events went unchallenged. By the time Gage's *Circumstantial Account* finally reached Dartmouth's desk on 10 June, it was far too late. As early as Tuesday 30 May, Lord Germain, the very man who was soon to take over from Dartmouth as secretary of state for the colonies, acknowledged the immediate impact of the Patriots' press campaign: "The news from America occasioned a great stir among us yesterday… the Bostonians are in the right to make the king's troops the aggressors and claim a victory."

Lexington and Concord gave the Patriots a crucial advantage for the war that followed. In particular, initial perceptions created on 19 April 1775 formed the

On both sides of the Atlantic there was growing disapproval of Britain's military leaders



DAMAGING LOSS
John Burgoyne surrenders to American commanders at Saratoga. Britain's defeat here in 1777 moved France and Spain towards formal declarations of war

basis for a growing contempt for the British military leadership, centred on disapproval – on both sides of the argument and on both sides of the Atlantic – at the Redcoats' perceived initial aggression and brutality in a losing cause.

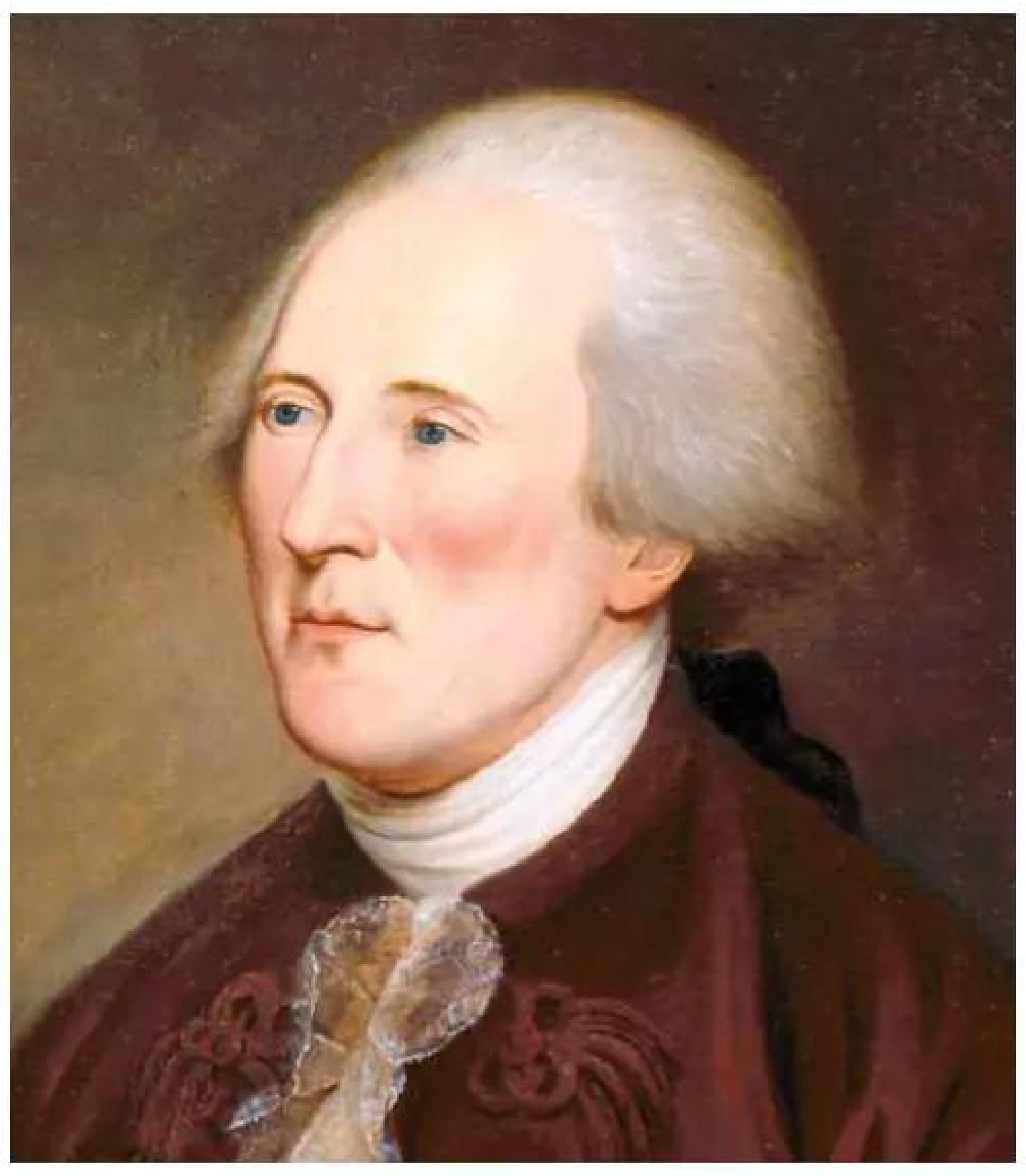
That perception of British military failure continued for a year. Though Redcoats forced the evolving American army from the field at Bunker Hill in June 1775 (where both Pitcairn and Warren were killed), it was at the cost of disproportionately large casualties on the British side. This was followed, in March 1776, by the British evacuation of Boston – an event that the Americans could claim as a victory. The sense of military ineptitude among Britain's leadership was etched all the deeper by the Americans having a counterpoint in the upright and gentlemanly General George Washington. From the moment he took command in July 1775 to the end of the conflict, the British press applauded the American leader, and were quick to compare him favourably to their own generals.

If the British Army was to win in America, it had needed to achieve victory swiftly and conclusively. By failing to do so, it not only entrenched the American Patriots' belief but gave them time to organise and recover from defeats in 1776 and 1777 and to gain foreign support. For there was another group with an eye on events in America and with an acute awareness of public opinion in Britain: French and Spanish diplomats. After British military incompetence gifted the Americans victory in the defeat at Saratoga in late 1777, first France and then Spain would formally enter the war. The path towards American victory would then be firmly set.

ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN

Historical record

As to who actually fired first, so important a consideration in the battle's aftermath, it is worth returning to Lieutenant Gould, the most senior of the captured British servicemen on 19 April. Though his signed statement had proved incredibly useful to the Patriots, Gould had said something altogether different to Brigadier Lord Percy during the battle itself. Percy noted that: "Between 1 and 2 o'clock in the afternoon I met with Lt Gould of the King's Own Regiment, who was wounded and who informed me that the Grenadiers and Light Infantry had been attacked by the rebels about daybreak."



The London-based Virginian Arthur Lee used his newspaper contacts to gain maximum exposure for the colonists' message

This information was in the draft version of Percy's account to Gage, written the following day and thus dating from some days before Gould signed his affidavit to Patriot justices. Percy had then thought it not worth including Gould's words to him in his finished letter, and the draft was just one of a number of documents that lay for many decades in a dust-encrusted box in the Duke of Northumberland's Library at Alnwick Castle.

On the draft's eventual publication in 1902, the difference between it and the final letter was noticed and noted, yet the significance of the omission was not. This potentially critical piece of evidence was no longer considered of consequence. The obscuring dust of time had done its work. H

George Goodwin's books include *Benjamin Franklin in London: The British Life of America's Founding Father* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2016)

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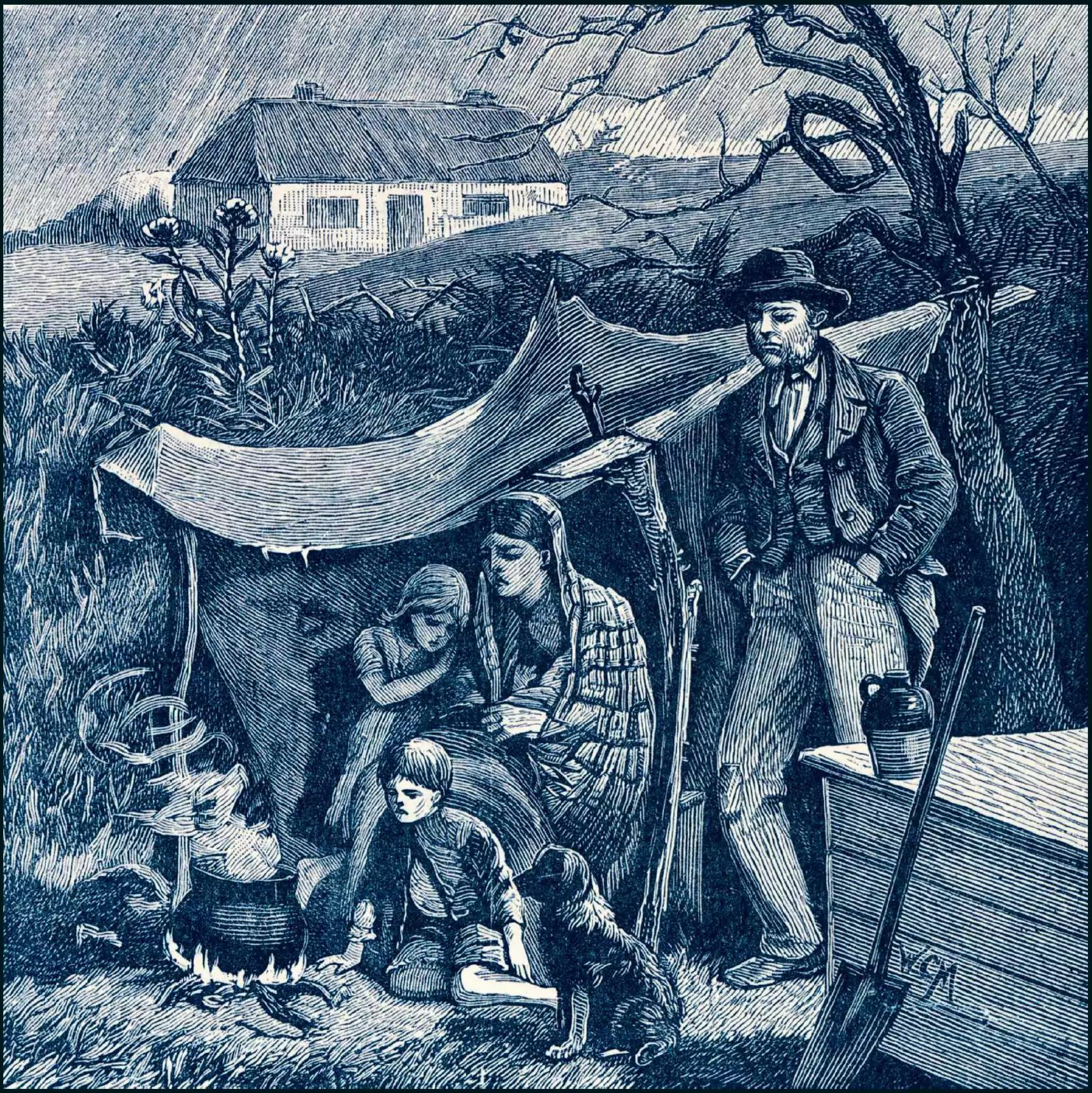

An evicted Irish family huddles around a cauldron during the 1840s. "The Great Famine was a political, ecological and economic disaster shaped by Ireland and Britain's long history of suspicion and tense interdependence," says Padraic X Scanlan

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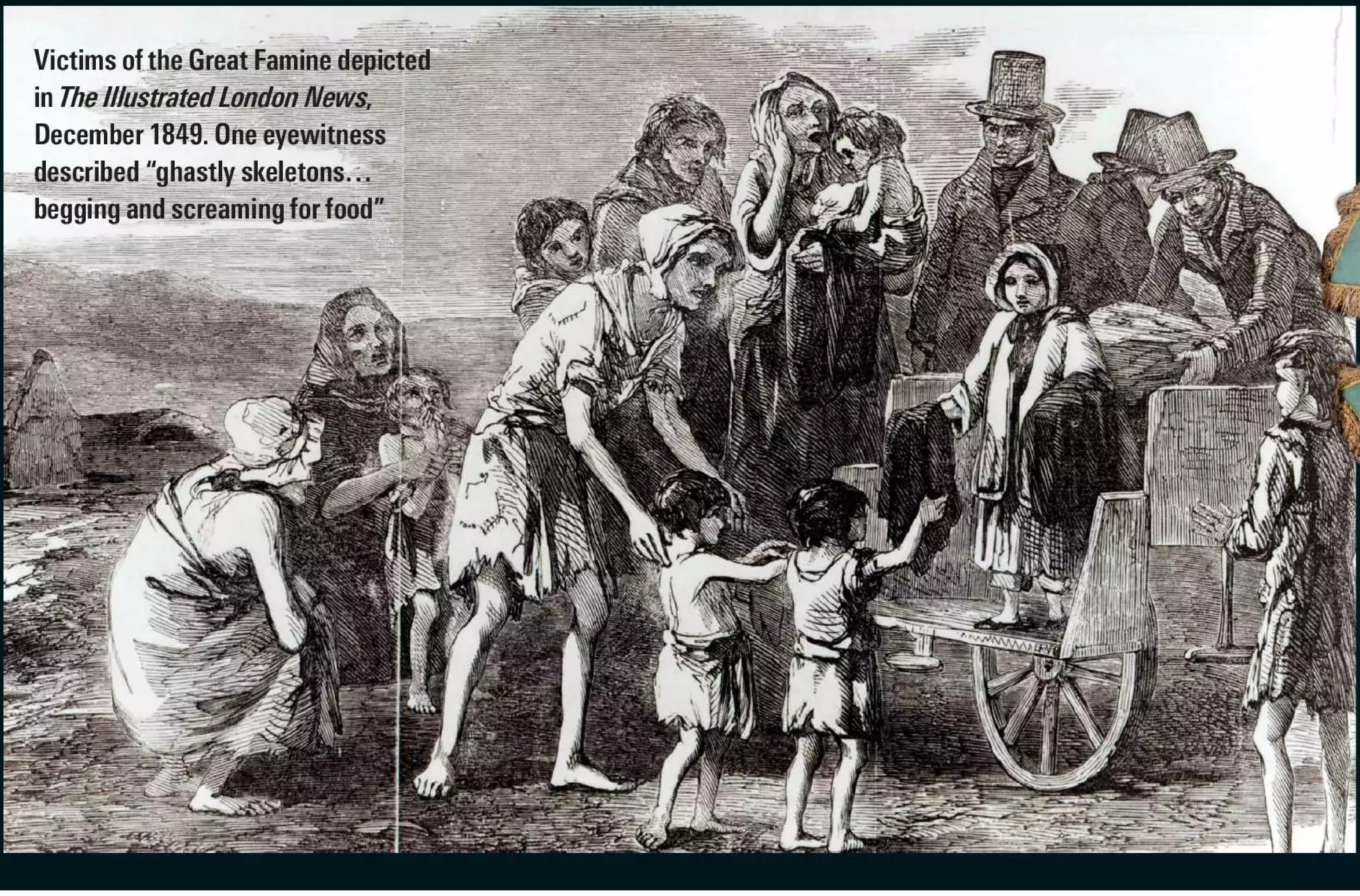
When blight began **devastating potato crops** across Ireland in 1845, British officials immediately recognised the dangers.

And yet, within six years, the **Great Famine** had caused the deaths of at least 1 million people.

This is the story of how tangled Anglo-Irish relations and a **profound devotion** to market forces turned a crisis into a national catastrophe.

BY PADRAIC X SCANLAN



Victims of the Great Famine depicted in *The Illustrated London News*, December 1849. One eyewitness described "ghastly skeletons… begging and screaming for food"

PRO·REGE·SÆPE·
SEMPER·
·PRO·PATRIA·

A flag of the Mayo Legion, which opposed the Irish Rebellion of 1798. The uprising's suppression helped precipitate Ireland's absorption into the United Kingdom

In late 1846, a magistrate called Nicholas Cummins visited Skibbereen, a small town in County Cork. The scenes he witnessed there, he would go on to write, "were such as no tongue or pen can convey the slightest idea of". Cummins described "famished and ghastly skeletons", nearly catatonic but shaking with fever, sheltered in unheated cottages. At the sound of footsteps, what seemed like hundreds of people emerged into the daylight, begging and screaming for food.

The horrors that Cummins encountered that day were repeated with terrible regularity across the island of Ireland. From 1845–51, as potato crops failed again and again, at least 1 million people died, many in lonely, hideous and degrading conditions. At least 1.5 million more emigrated. The people of Ireland had endured periods of starvation before, but they had encountered nothing on the scale of what we remember today as the Great Famine.

'Paddy', with his potatoes, pigs and superstitions, was a stock figure in British popular culture

As the death toll soared, Ireland seemed remote, an isolated hell. And yet the Great Famine was a British, as well as an Irish, crisis. Ireland had, after all, been under sometimes notional English dominion since the Middle Ages. It had been conquered in the 17th century, invaded by Oliver Cromwell's forces during the Civil Wars, and then, once more, by William III's armies after the Glorious Revolution.

During the 18th century, restrictions on trade subordinated Ireland's economy to Britain's. The Irish Catholic majority were dispossessed and barred from public life. After the rebellion of the United Irish against British rule in 1798, the 1800–01 Acts of Union combined Ireland and Britain into a new United Kingdom.

Britain and Ireland were now more closely intertwined than ever. The union had one currency and an integrated economy. Ireland sent 100 MPs to Westminster. By 1845, nearly a third of the population of the UK lived in Ireland.

But when famine struck, the gulf within the union seemed unbridgeable. John Russell, prime minister at the height of the crisis, implied that Ireland and Britain, though geographically close, were distant in time. Ireland, he told the House of Commons, suffered under "a famine of the 13th century acting upon the population of the 19th".

A nation without hope

The Great Famine, however, *was* a modern famine, a political, ecological and economic disaster shaped by Ireland and Britain's long history of suspicion and tense interdependence. Ireland was never a formal British colony, but its relationship to Britain was colonial. Britain extracted rent and agricultural products from Ireland. It sent Irish soldiers to fight for the empire abroad, while maintaining garrisons in Ireland to put down rebellion. 'Paddy', with his rundown home and dirty brood of children, his potatoes, pigs, lies and superstitions, was a stock figure in British popular culture.

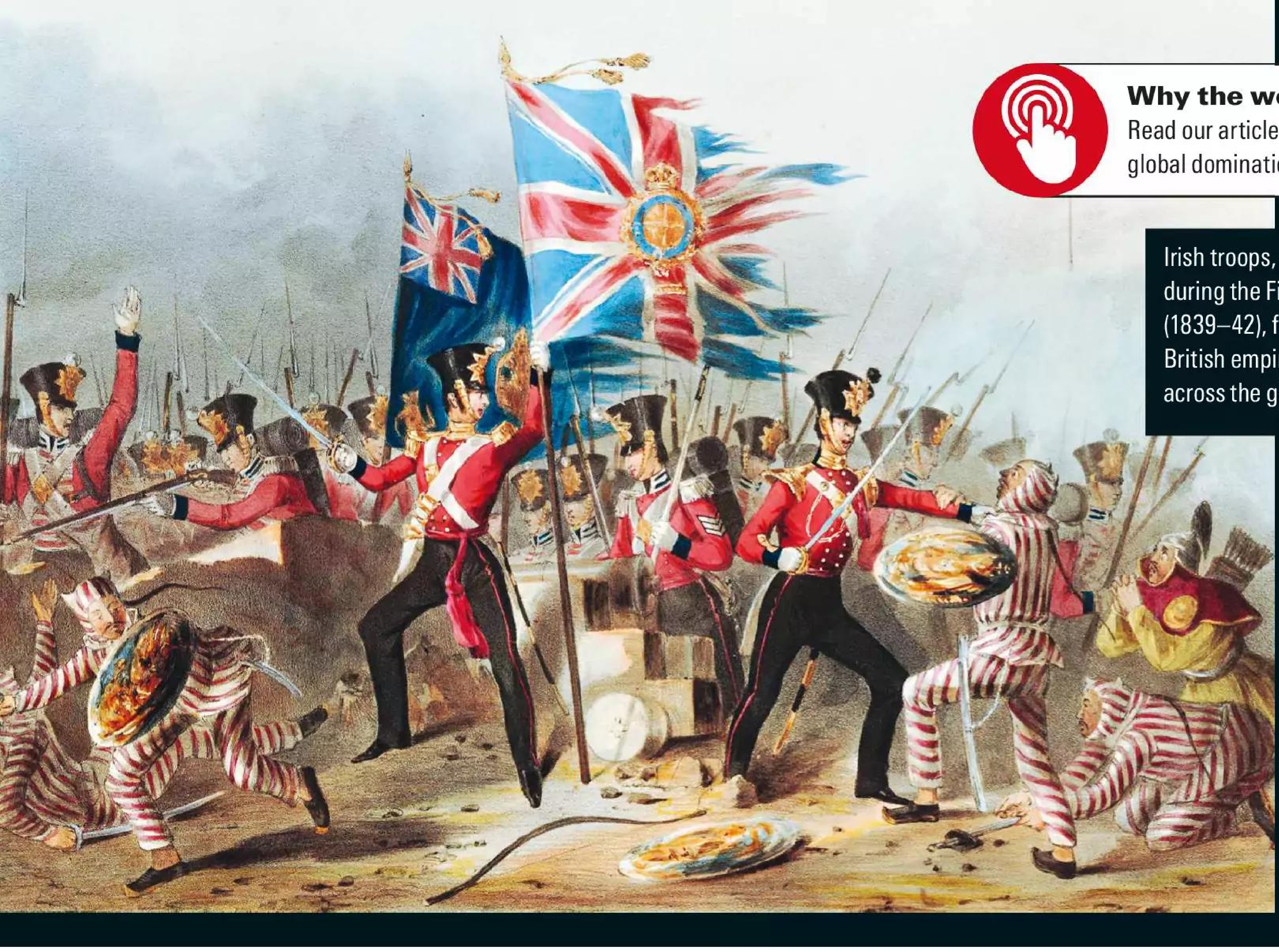
Many blamed the Irish for the catastrophe of the famine, drawing on these caricatures. Stone cottages, rooting pigs, potatoes stored in dirt pits, cold, acidic peatlands – the aesthetic of the Irish countryside was archaic and earthy, especially in comparison with Britain's seething industrial cities. As Charles Trevelyan, the bureaucrat who organised famine relief, asked: "What hope is there for a nation which lives on potatoes?"

The potato was not an ancient crop in Europe: it was introduced from the Americas by Iberian conquistadores in the 16th century. Yet there was a key distinction between Ireland and the rest of the continent in the way the crop was utilised. Across Europe, potatoes were embraced as a backstop against the failure of other crops. In Ireland, however, they quickly went from 'famine food' to staple.

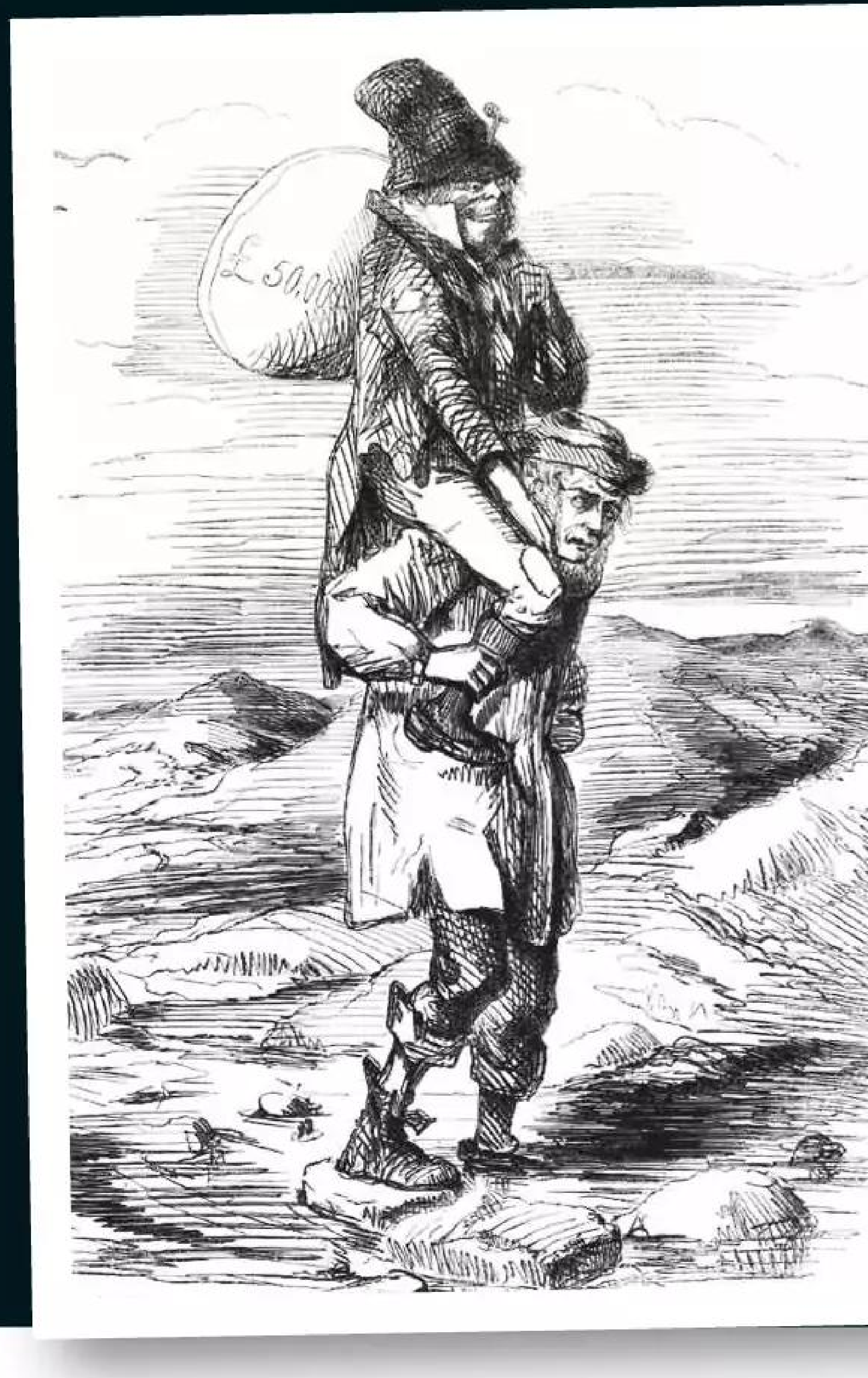
During the 18th century, Irish land was subdivided into smaller and smaller parcels. As rents increased, farmers who might have eaten some of their oats or other crops sold them all, and fell back on potatoes for subsistence.

BRIDGEMAN/AKG

Why the world was so reliant on potatoes
Read our article exploring how the vegetable achieved global domination at *historyextra.com/history-potato*



Irish troops, shown in battle during the First Opium War (1839–42), fought for the British empire in conflicts across the globe



An English labourer carries his "burden" – "the Irish old man of the mountain" – in a *Punch* cartoon from the mid-19th century. British stereotypes of lazy, freeloading Irishmen shaped the authorities' reaction to the onset of famine

Between 1741 and 1779 the number of Irish acres planted with potatoes was reported to have increased twentyfold. By 1845, on the eve of the famine, Ireland exported roughly 250,000 head of cattle, 90 million eggs and enough grain to feed 2 million people in Britain each year. But the Irish poor almost never ate anything but potatoes. "They are just as much fed on flour as they are clad in jewels and embroidery," *The Times* commented.

Hyper-dependence on potatoes seemed to confirm British stereotypes about the Irish, as though Paddy had planted them to saunter and laze, to indulge in whiskey and blarney. But potatoes, although abundant in good years, are very vulnerable to disease. Some estimated that as much as one-fifth of the population lived on the edge of famine every season.

The Irish poor relied on complex credit arrangements, borrowing against their potato crops or trading labour for land, a cycle some called 'working for the dead horse'. The Irish economy responded to world markets. "I do not know which is worse for the poor farmer: the fall or the rise," a Roscommon labourer wondered. "When the market tumbles, where is the rent? And when the price gets up in a hurry, where is the food?"

Long before the famine, Ireland's economy looked old but was perilously new; Ireland's potatoes looked secure, but were precarious. And Britain was dazzled by what seemed to be the natural modernising power of the free market. The law of the market, described by the new discipline of political economy, seemed analogous to the natural laws of physics. Political economy, an Irish noble declared, was as certain as "the Newtonian philosophy", rejected only by "the profoundly ignorant".

If economies had natural laws, it followed that the best policy was 'laissez-faire', to let the market "bring things as nearly as possible to this their natural state", as an official wrote. Laissez-faire, however, was hard work. It took a lot of regulation to make markets behave 'naturally'. And so, even before the famine, British officials hoped to apply the pressures of market forces to reform Ireland. They could not see that those very forces – the demands of the British market, shaped by conquest and colonial exploitation – were what had made Ireland vulnerable.

Foul-smelling pulp

By the summer of 1845, *Phytophthora infestans* had crossed the Atlantic, probably among a shipment of fertiliser or seed potatoes bound for Belgium. The organism, a fungus-like 'water mould', was native to central Mexico, where potatoes grow wild. The 'late blight' caused by *P infestans* spread unchecked from Sweden to Spain, killing potatoes in the ground and turning stored potatoes into foul-smelling pulp. In the Netherlands, potato yields for 1845 fell by 71 per cent compared to previous averages; in Belgium, 87 per cent. The London newspapers reported on food riots in the Baltic and Poland, and on emergency restrictions of grain exports in the Ottoman empire.

British officials immediately recognised that the blight would be catastrophic in Ireland. But the idea that Ireland was backward, and that its backwardness was a consequence of an uncivilised indolence and comfort made possible by cheap potatoes, was too pervasive to overcome. It was crucial, by those lights, that all aid be conditional. Britain's own Poor Law had a similar ethos. Recipients of relief in England were sent to workhouses, to deter all but the most desperate. In Ireland, this principle was stretched to absurd extremes.

In 1845, Robert Peel's government met the first wave of the blight by importing 44 million pounds of American maize, sold at cost by local Relief Committees. Irish labourers who were unable to find work could apply for jobs at public works projects to earn money with which to buy the 'Indian corn'. Maize was alien to the Irish – that was why Peel preferred it. Buying maize, he reasoned, would not disrupt the trade in wheat and oats, and would head off any restriction on the export of Irish crops.

Relief officers were warned never to give away food. As Trevelyan reminded his staff, "Our plan is not to give the meal away, but to sell it." Officers were told to separate 'normal' hunger from hunger caused by the

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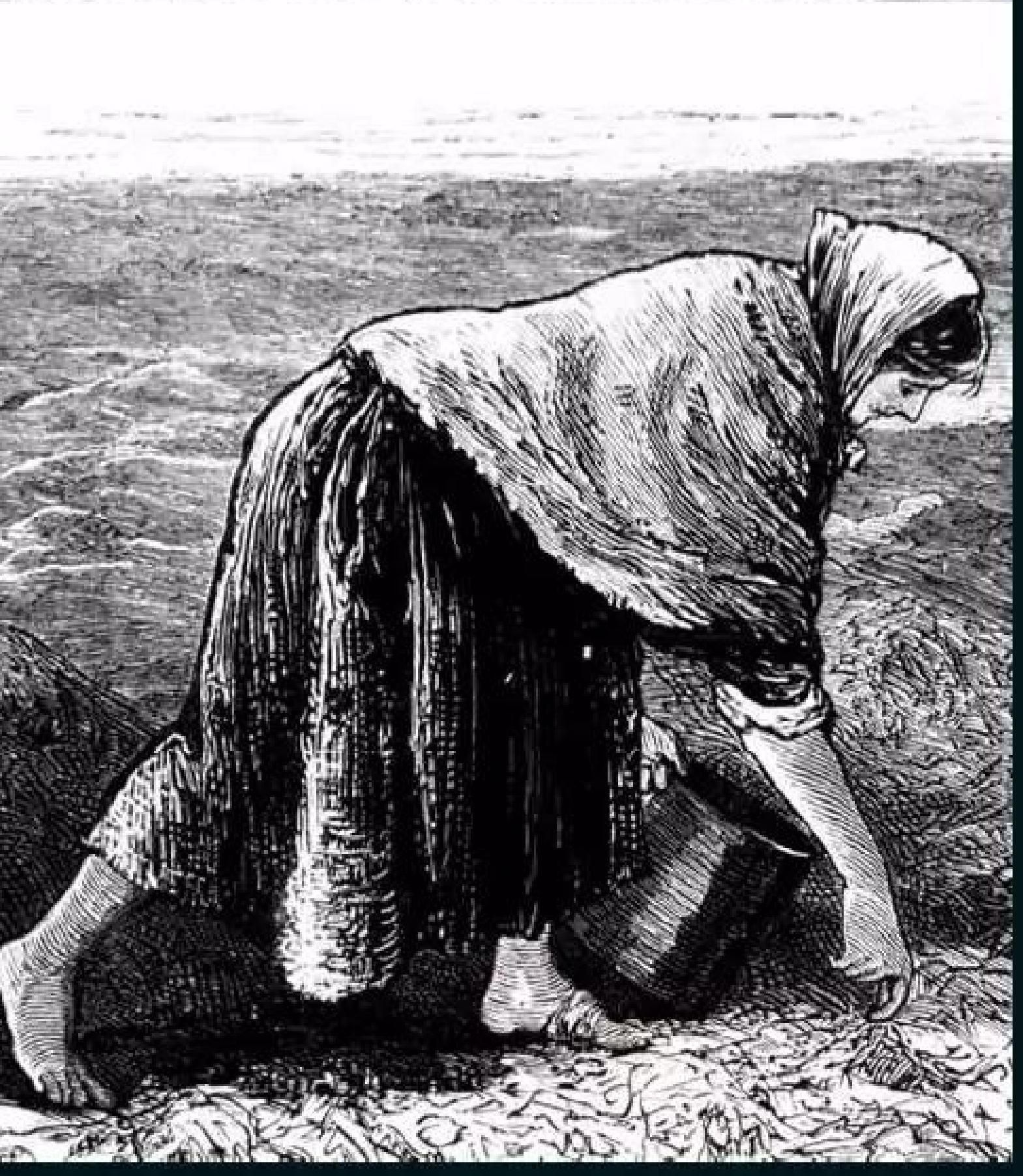
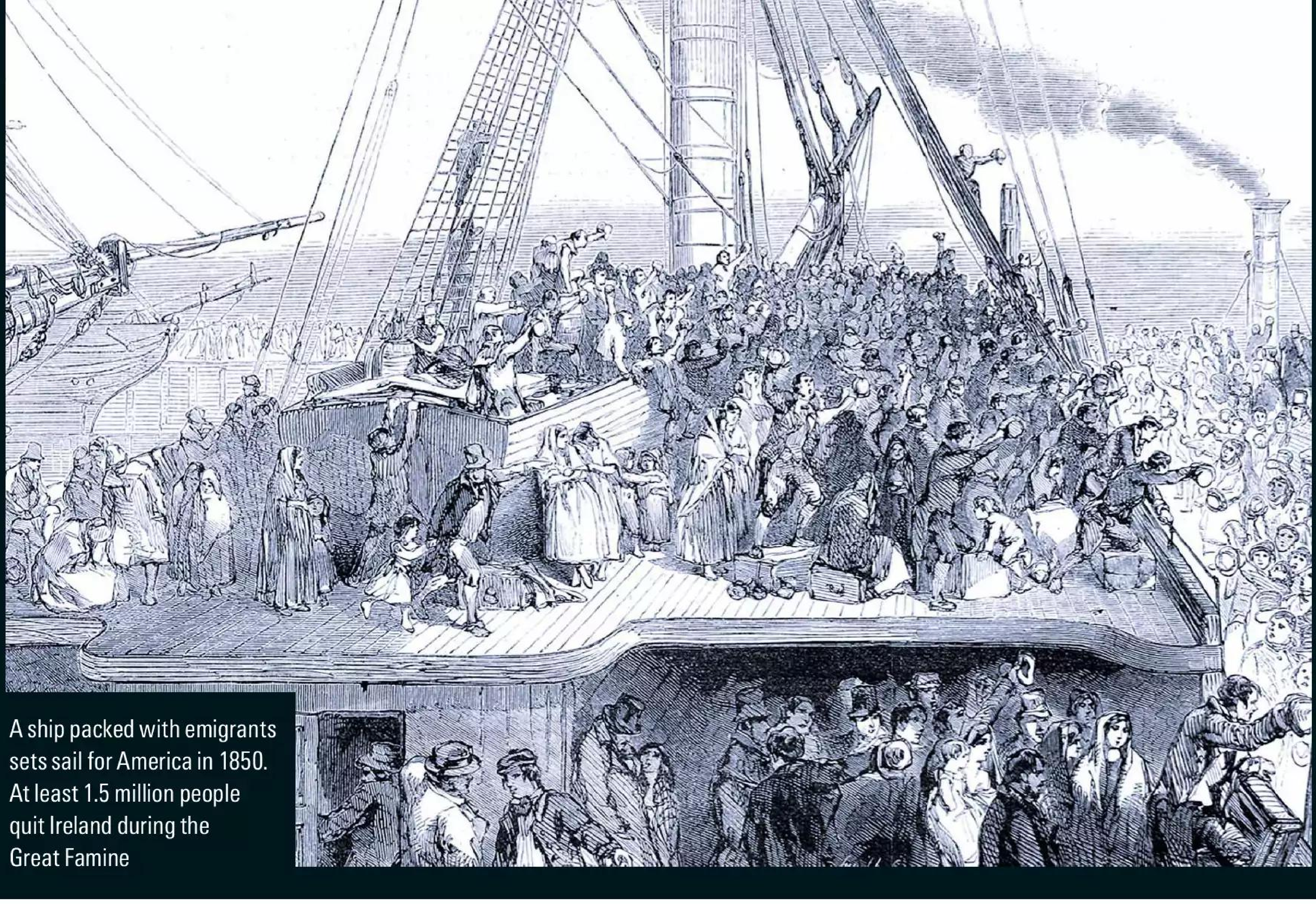


An Irish woman collects seaweed for food in a 19th-century engraving. All the while, Ireland exported enormous quantities of grain and livestock



A ship packed with emigrants sets sail for America in 1850. At least 1.5 million people quit Ireland during the Great Famine

failure of the potato. Food riots and hunger-related disease increased. Ireland, however, had experienced potato failure before. Although 1845–46 was one of the worst subsistence crises in Ireland since the union, no one expected that the blight would return in 1846.

However, by midsummer, potatoes larger than a marble could hardly be found in Irish fields. In 1846, fewer potatoes were planted, and a greater proportion were destroyed. During the winter of 1846–47 – 'Black 47' – Irish society all but collapsed. An estimated 400,000 people died – thousands of starvation, and hundreds of thousands of diseases associated with hunger, especially typhus. People ate seaweed, grass, roots, carrion, dirt and the eggs of wild birds. As much as 3 per cent of the Irish population emigrated. Some ship captains offered free passage for the poor, as living ballast, as they were "cheaper to ship and unship… than… lime or shingle".

Irish society all but collapsed. People ate seaweed, grass, roots, carrion, dirt and the eggs of wild birds

Still Ireland continued to export food – a basic principle of the relief programme. According to estimates, in 1846–47, some 3.3 million acres were planted with grain, and Irish farms raised more than 2.5 million cattle, 2.2 million sheep and 600,000 pigs. Waterford alone exported more than 20,200 barrels of wheat and nearly 59,000 barrels of oats from May 1846 to February 1847.

A moral hazard?

Peel's government fell in the summer of 1846. The new prime minister, the Whig nobleman Lord John Russell, continued to adhere to the principle that the moral hazard of giving relief without expecting labour or money in exchange was as insidious as starvation. Where Peel had emphasised importing food for sale, Russell emphasised offering jobs at public works to allow the Irish poor to earn wages. Although food imports did increase, even many who could find work struggled to find food to buy. Ireland – especially the countryside – had very little infrastructure for selling imported food. "The ordinary mercantile machinery," Trevelyan worried, "even of the greatest trading nation in the world, is unequal to such a novel emergency."

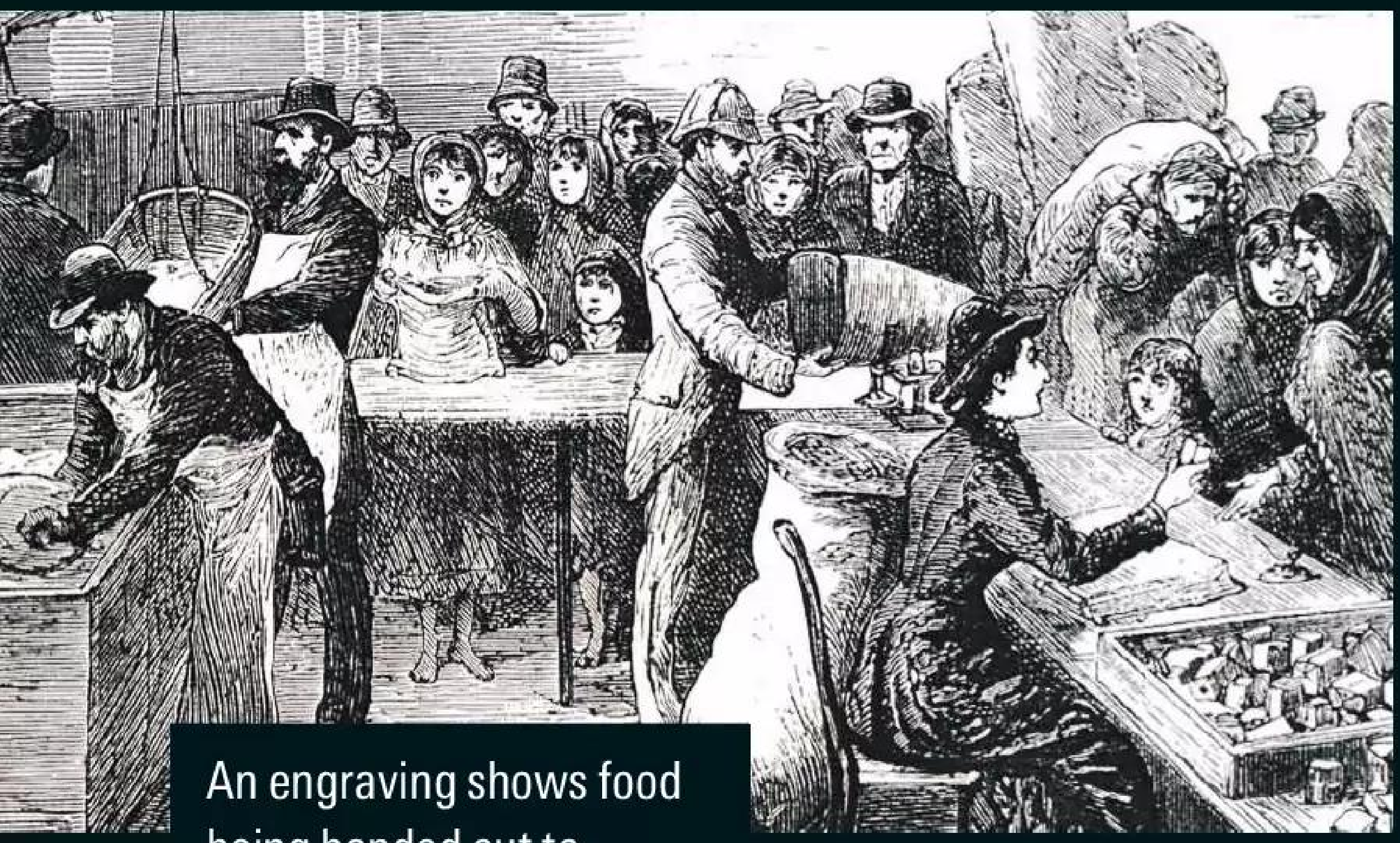
Thousands of public works opened, most of them offering make-work jobs, paying wages set by law at twopence less than the average local wage (a provision meant to encourage private employment, enforced in districts that had virtually no such work on offer). To many, relief work was nothing more than "digging holes and filling them up again". A plan premised on the natural laws of the market required nearly 12,000 clerks and officers to administer. By March 1847, more than 700,000 people had jobs on the works.

Designed to save money, Russell's public works cost more than £944,000 – about £102.4m today when adjusted for inflation. However, inflation is not always the most useful measure of the relative value of money over time. In 2022, a government project on a similar scale to the 1846–47 public works, in proportion to the gross domestic product of the present-day UK, would cost more than £3.83bn. The government's tunnel vision, focused on checking 'indolence' and dependence among the desperate Irish, and on enforcing economy and austerity, proved expensive and wasteful.

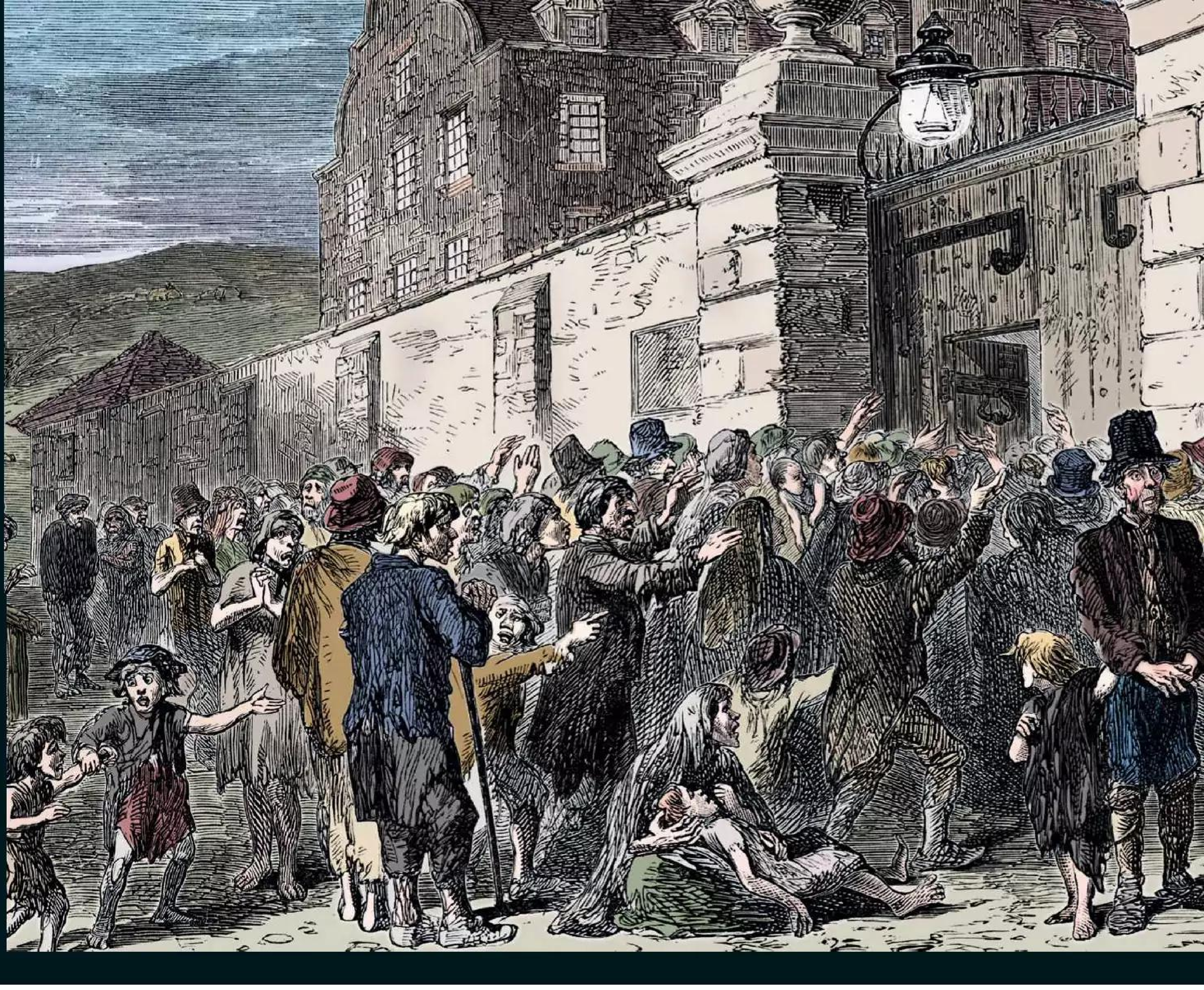
Meanwhile, widely reprinted reports from places like Skibbereen inspired sympathy around the world. In January 1847, Queen Victoria wrote a letter to the archbishop of Canterbury asking for a collection in aid of famine victims. The letter, printed in *The Times*, opened a campaign that attracted hundreds of thousands of pounds of donations.

The charity was timely. Facing ballooning costs, and thrown off-balance in the spring of 1847 by a financial crisis, the Whig government quickly wound down the public works and sponsored a programme of local soup kitchens, financed directly by grants and donations. At their peak in the summer of 1847, the kitchens distributed daily rations to some 3 million people – all of whom were

ALAMY/TOPFOTO



An engraving shows food being handed out to victims of the famine. By the summer of 1847, soup kitchens were distributing rations to 3 million people across Ireland



Starving people throng a workhouse during the Great Famine, in a c1900 illustration. The prevailing view among British political leaders was that relief should only be offered in exchange for money or labour

expected to prove that they had no other means of subsistence. The soup kept bellies full, but was not always nutritionally complete. Health officials recorded outbreaks of scurvy. "The feeding of dogs in a kennel was far more decent and orderly," one observer wrote.

The soup kitchen programme was only ever intended to be temporary. As kitchens closed in the autumn of 1847, the Russell government devolved responsibility for famine relief onto Ireland's Poor Law Unions, which had the power to levy taxes in order to pay for the relief of the local poor. This principle, that "Irish property should support Irish poverty", might have functioned better in normal economic conditions. However, after nearly three years of famine, many unions quickly ran out of money. To deter applications to the unions and their workhouses, relief could only be given to people occupying a quarter-acre of land or less.

A month's hard labour

Evictions, always a threat in rural Ireland, increased in number. Bailiffs tore the roofs off cottages and threw the residents into the fields. Magistrates could imprison people found outside of their 'home' union for up to a month's hard labour. Irish society, the commissioners of the new system declared, could only be protected from "a state of almost universal pauperisation" by these rigid rules.

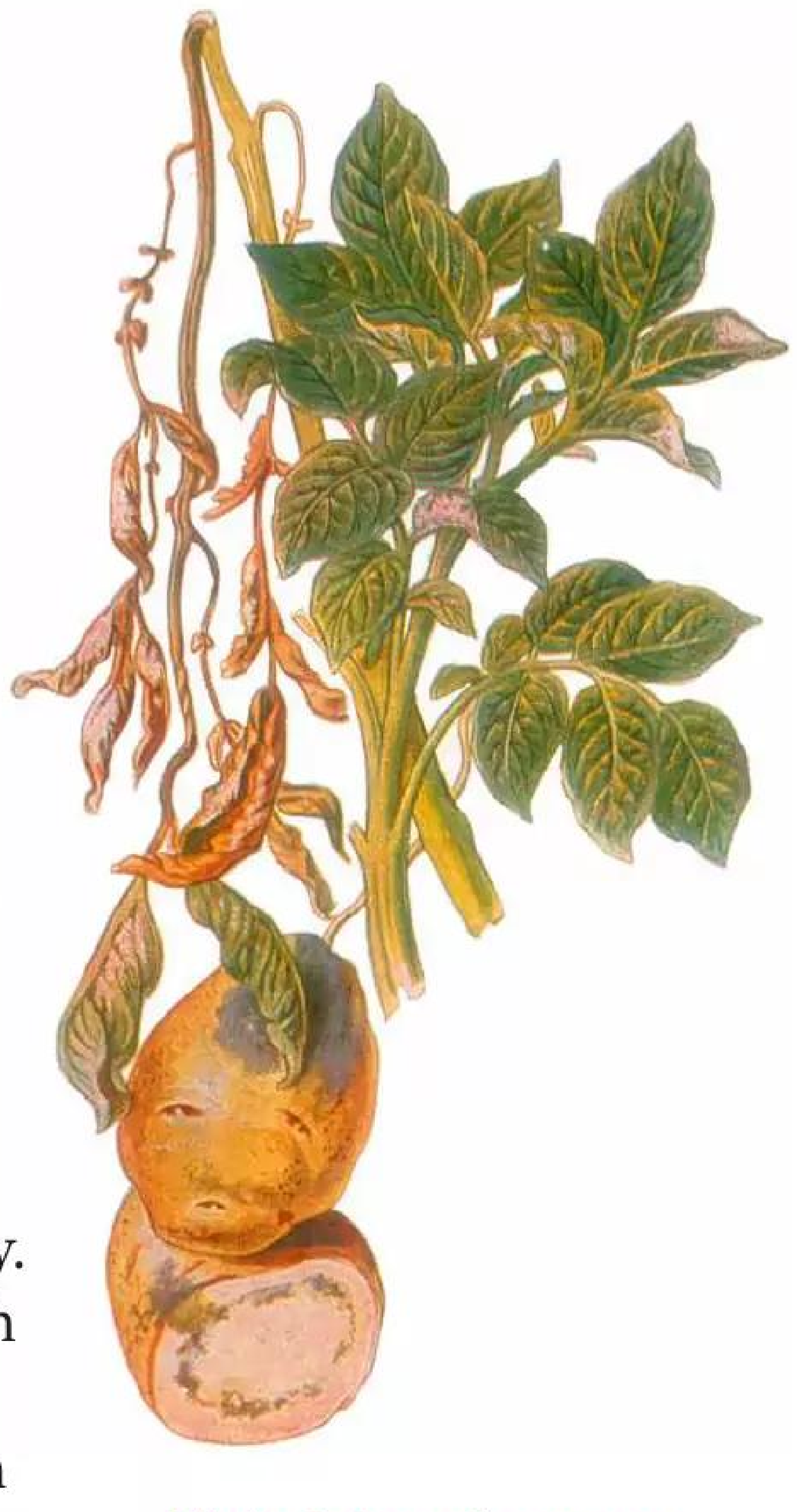
In the summer of 1848, a group of Irish nationalists, inspired by the revolutions sweeping continental Europe, attempted to overthrow British rule in Ireland. The 'Young Ireland' rebellion was swiftly crushed. Then, in autumn 1848, the blight returned. Following the rebellion, 'laissez-faire' turned vengeful. "The true thing to do," Charles Wood, the chancellor of the Exchequer, told a colleague, is "to do nothing."

In the poorest Irish counties, the winter of 1848–49 was as bad or worse than 1846–47. In County Clare, for example, the death rate kept rising from 1847 until early in 1850. By July 1849, about 1 million people depended either on the workhouse or outdoor relief given by workhouse staff. Although this was one-third of the number who had relied on soup kitchens two years earlier, the demand for relief in 1849 was regional, concentrated in the poorest counties in Ireland along the western coast and in the countryside of the southwest. Across Ireland, the cost of relief increased from £1.7m in 1848 to £2.2m in 1849. Even in 1850, when the situation had stabilised, some unions were still supporting one-third or more of the population in their districts.

By 1851, the 'late blight' that killed Irish potatoes had become endemic in Ireland. Irish potato crops remained susceptible to blight, but the disease spread less explosively. Meanwhile, mass death and mass emigration had – with brute force – somewhat reduced the pressure on Irish land.

The Great Famine was the worst humanitarian crisis to afflict the United Kingdom in the 19th century. It is the most important event in the history of the Irish diaspora. But the Great Famine was neither the first, nor the last, cataclysmic food shortage in the Victorian British empire. The Agra famine of 1837–38 in present-day Uttar Pradesh killed 800,000 people. Unstable climactic conditions generated droughts and famines in 1876–79, 1889–91 and 1896–1902 that killed at least 15 million in British India.

Crop failure was usually caused by natural phenomena – drought, heavy rains and population explosions of pests – but famine in the empire followed when imperial administrators placed their faith in the market to solve food shortages. There was almost always enough food. The obstacle was a stubborn insistence that private merchants deliver food to the hungry, and that the hungry pay for it, for their own good. The poverty of the imperial imagination made it impossible to imagine an alternative.



Blight-infected potatoes shown in a drawing. The fungus decimated crops across 1840s Europe

Padraic X Scanlan is an associate professor at the University of Toronto. His latest book is *Rot: A History of the Irish Famine* (Robinson, March 2025)

Melvyn Bragg and guests discussed the Great Famine on BBC Radio 4's **In Our Time**.
Listen here: *bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0003rj1*

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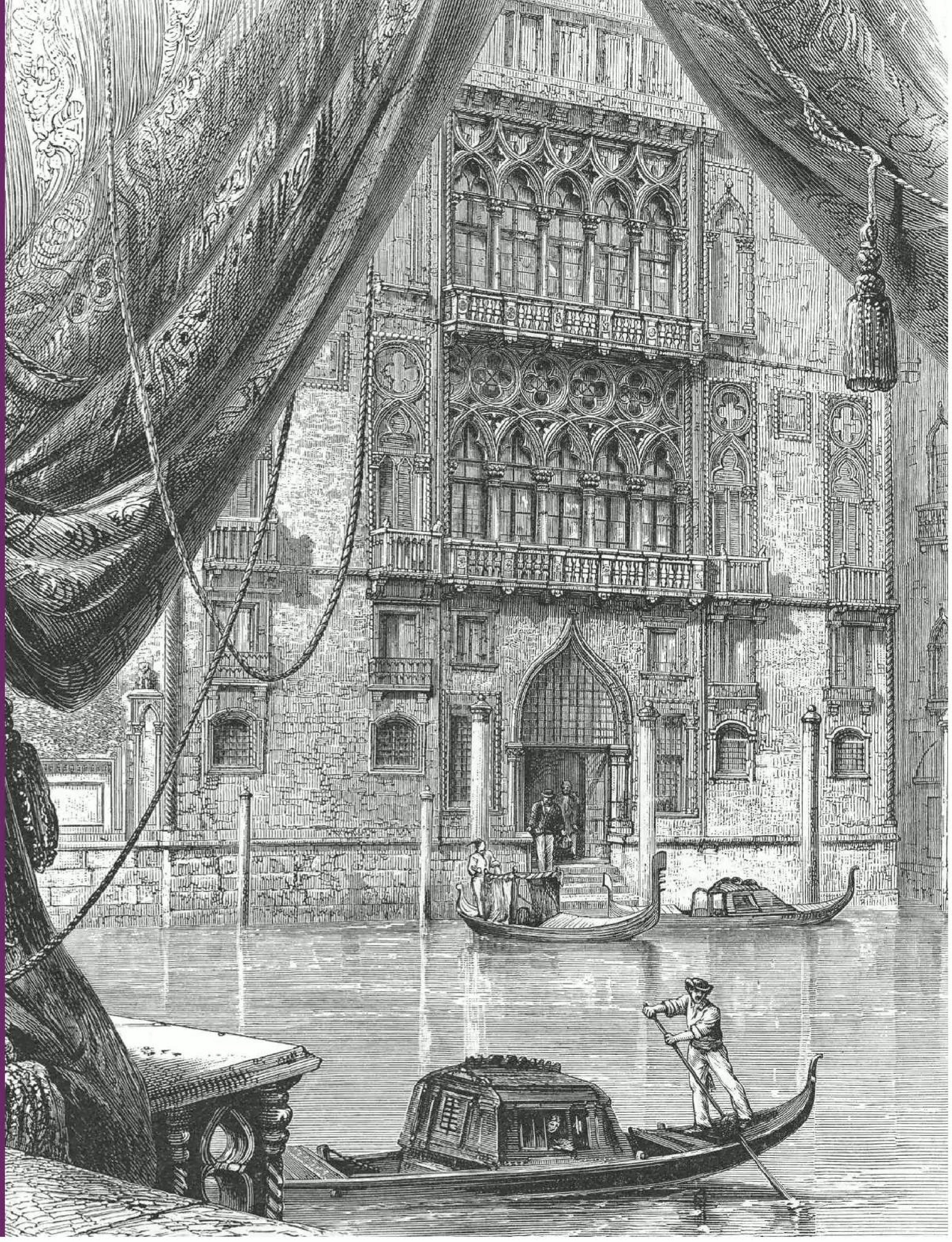

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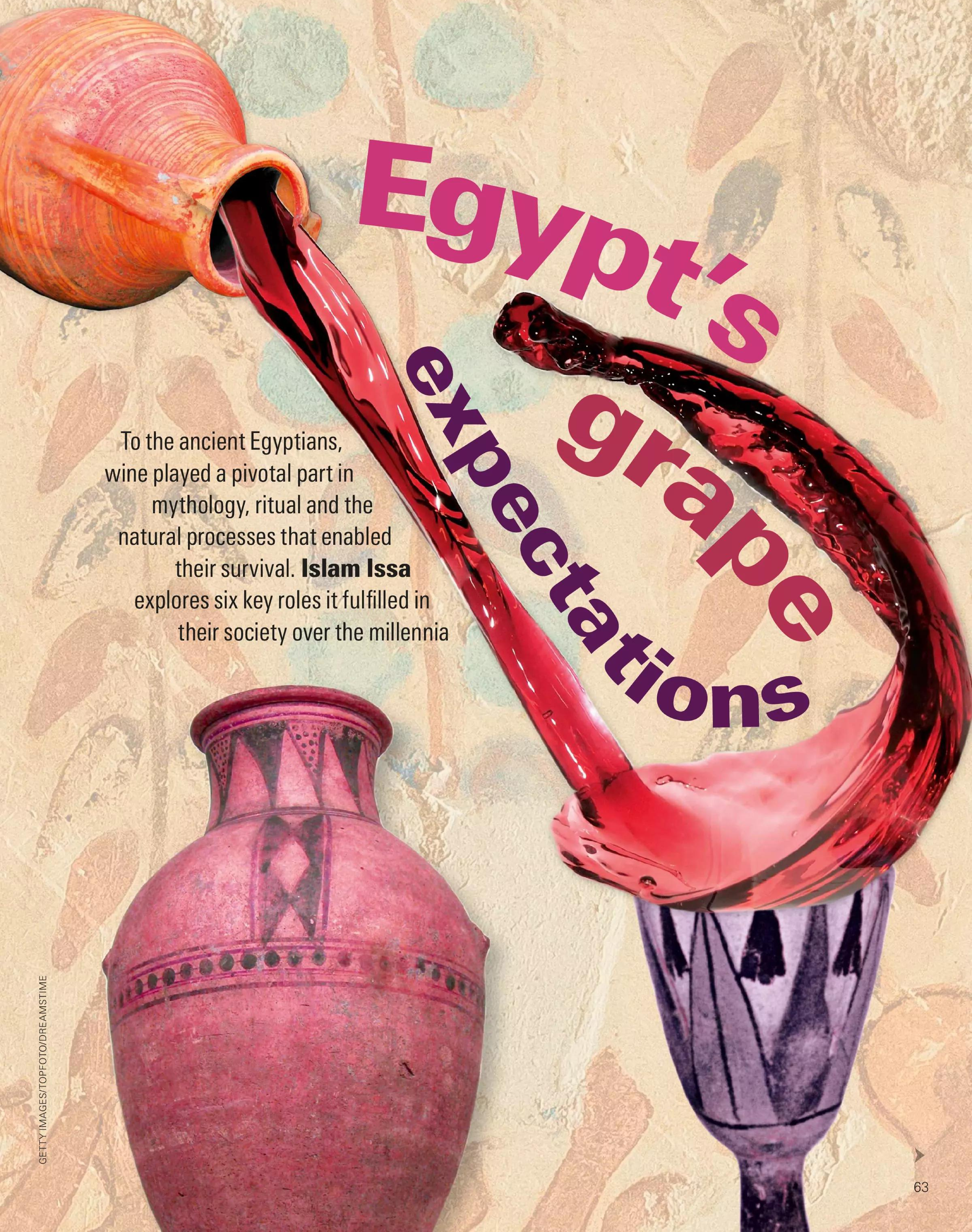

Egypt's grape expectations

To the ancient Egyptians, wine played a pivotal part in mythology, ritual and the natural processes that enabled their survival. **Islam Issa** explores six key roles it fulfilled in their society over the millennia

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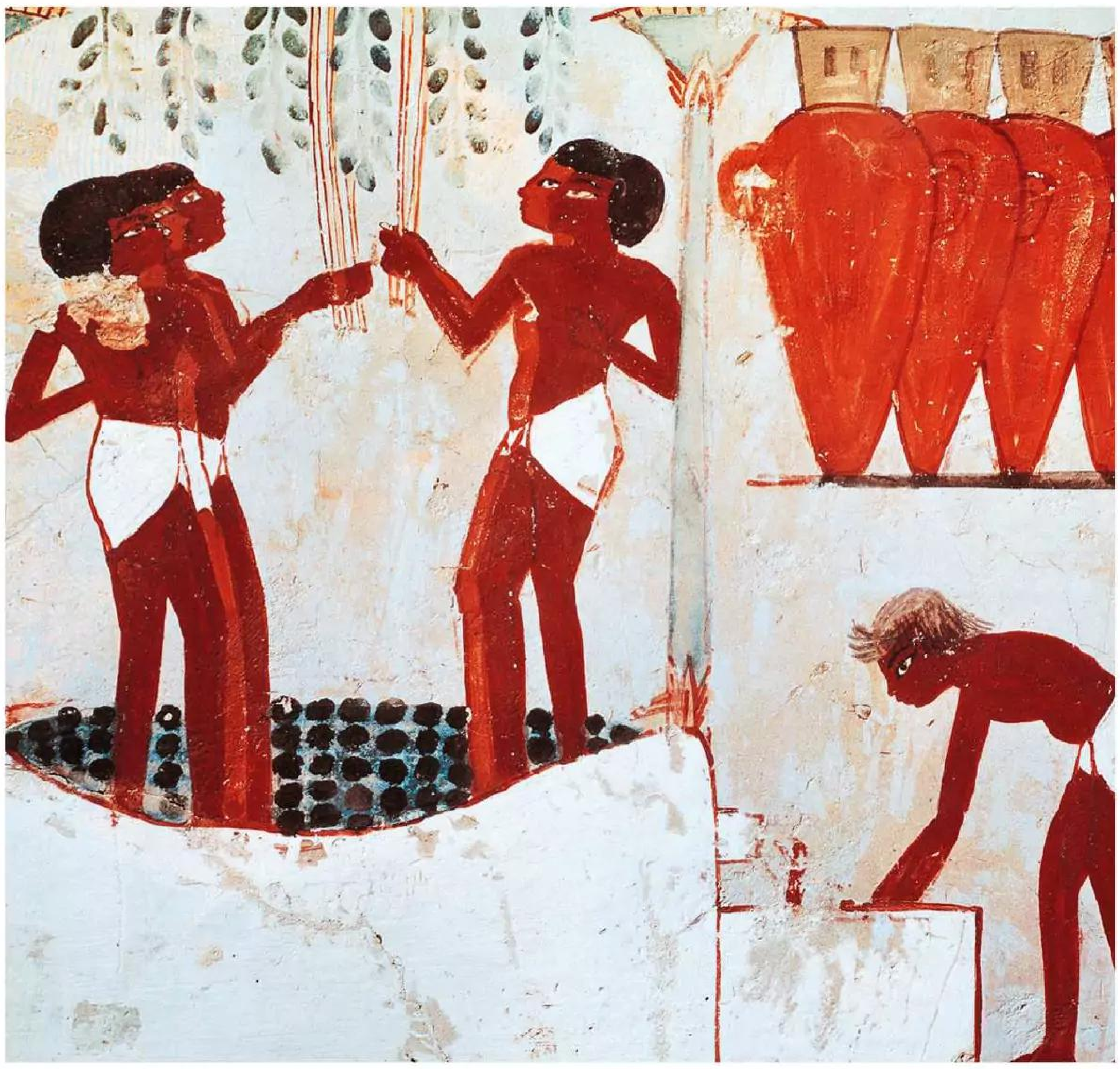


Grape harvesting is shown in a tomb painting in Thebes dating from at least the 14th century BC – perhaps two millennia after vines were first cultivated in Egypt

ORIGINS & TRADE

Fermenting change

Today we associate it with relaxation and refinement, ritual and religion, even industry and investment. And the varied uses of wine are nothing new. After grapes arrived in Egypt, over 5,000 years ago, wine made major, lasting – and often surprising – impacts on its society and culture.

The earliest vineyard remains in Egypt date from the fourth millennium BC. The oldest wine jar yet discovered was made c3000 BC – and jars continue to be found.

Following the introduction of grape cultivation from the Levant sometime before 3000 BC, grapes became the main ingredient fermented to make *irep* (wine), which was typically red. For lengthy periods, wine made from the fruit (dates) or sap of palm trees was more affordable, and other fruits such as figs and pomegranates were also fermented with sugar to make wine.

Wine was both a staple and a valuable commodity to be bought and sold. Vineyards were largely owned by nobles who could also enjoy wine on an everyday basis, while ordinary people typically drank it only during festivals, or might receive it as a work bonus.

Scenes of the grape harvest appear in several tombs, the earliest from the Old Kingdom in the third millennium BC. Some tomb depictions show the whole winemaking process from harvesting, treading and pressing to fermentation. In these illustrations, wine is most often presented in a small round cup.

Over time, Egyptian wine began to be exported, particularly after Alexandria, founded in the fourth century BC by Alexander the Great, became a global trading hub. Recently discovered wine amphorae – bottles with two small looped handles – demonstrate that wine from around Lake Mareotis (or Mariout), lying immediately south of Alexandria, reached destinations on the Strait of Sicily and as far as the coast of what's now southern France near Marseille. Several classical writers, including the Roman poets Horace and Virgil, mentioned Mareotic wine; the Greek writer Athenaeus described it as "pleasant [and] fragrant". Cleopatra is said to have carried Mareotic wine on her fleet.

MYTHOLOGY

God of wine

Wine wasn't just a pleasant drink in ancient Egypt – it was linked to significant episodes in foundational mythology.

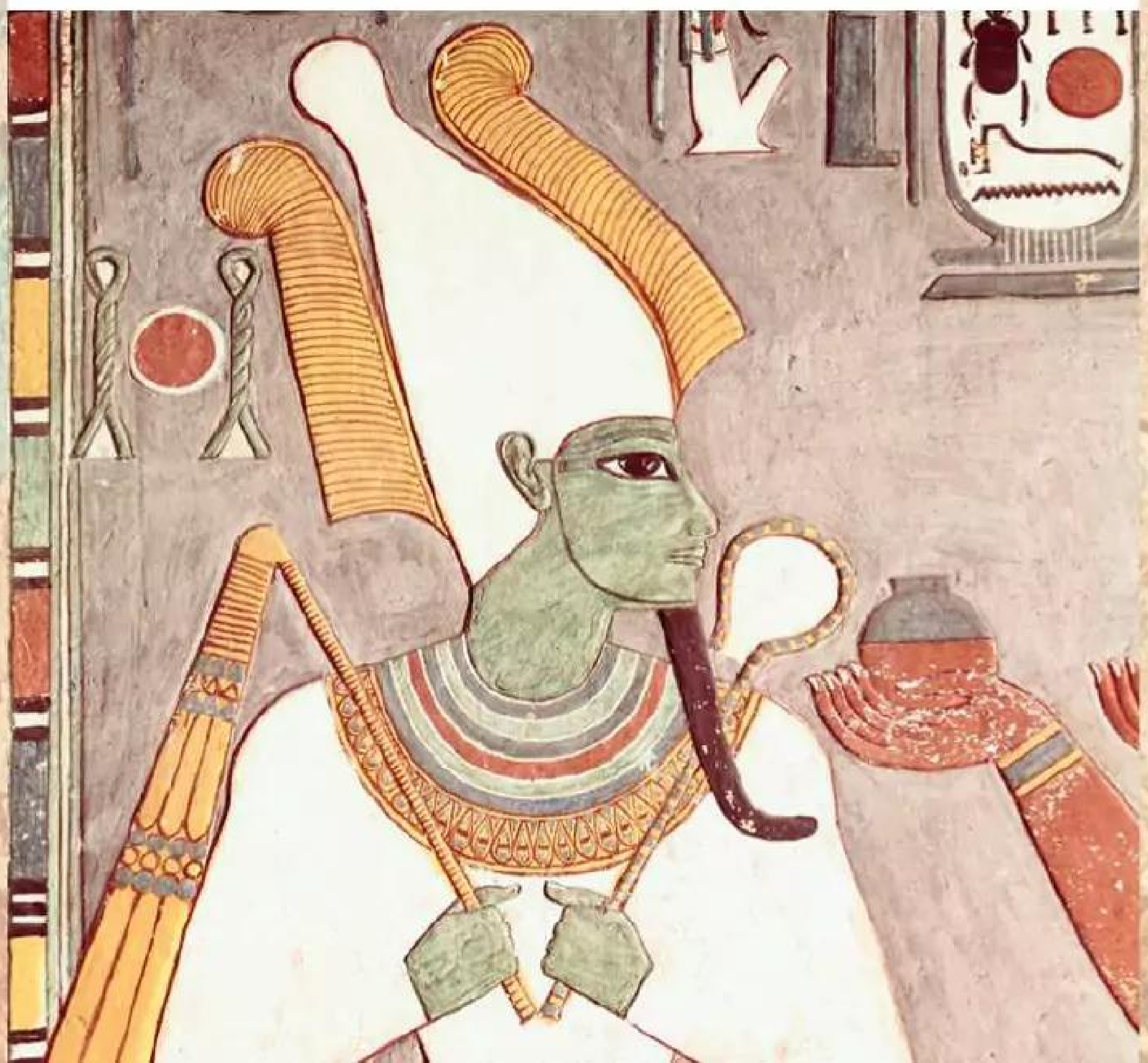
In a pivotal tale, green-faced Osiris (below) – one of the most significant gods in the ancient Egyptian pantheon – was murdered by his jealous brother, Set, who locked him in a coffin and threw it into the Nile. Osiris's blood infused the river with rich minerals, and caused the annual flooding that underpins the Egyptian soil's fertility – an event that, to the ancient population, was nothing short of divine.

According to Greek and Roman historians, excess soil washed into the Nile turned the river a reddish colour. In the ancient myth, though, it was Osiris's blood that was not only turning the waters red but also irrigating and nourishing crops.

In the story, Osiris's remains were found by his wife, Isis, who carefully put his body parts back together. He returned to life, and impregnated her with the god Horus. Naturally, Osiris's death and resurrection led him to become associated with rejuvenation, paralleling the cycle of the land from one harvest to the next – including the renewing grapevine.

In the Temple of Edfu, built 237–57 BC on the site of an earlier monument between Luxor and Aswan, one inscription reveals how the local "vineyard flourishes" when the "inundation" of the Nile takes place and the land "bears fruit with more grapes than [the sand of] the riverbanks". Because wine production depended on the annual flooding, Osiris became closely connected with the drink – especially red wine, which closely resembles soil and blood.

In the Pyramid Texts – the oldest funerary texts, dating to the third millennium BC – Osiris, earlier venerated as the god of agriculture and resurrection, is described as the "lord of wine in flood". He was regarded by Egyptians as the originator and teacher of viticulture and winemaking.



BRIDGEMAN

Hear it from the grapevine
Islam Issa discusses ancient Egyptian wine on a forthcoming podcast: *historyextra.com/podcast*

Lion-headed warrior deity Sekhmet (left), depicted on an Egyptian jewel. A Festival of Drunkenness recalled the myth in which other gods quelled Sekhmet's violence with wine

RITES & RITUALS

Drunken deities

Considered the blood of the gods, red wine was a common offering in temples. Osiris, in particular, was honoured through annual offerings of grain and wine. Because red wine wasn't always affordable, barley wine (essentially a kind of beer) was often substituted.

In everyday life, Egyptians referred to wine as the 'eye of Horus', the divine child of Osiris and Isis. One ritual involved pouring wine into a depression on the temple altar, also called the Eye of Horus – a reference to the injury he sustained during the battle with his uncle Set, god of violence. In that episode, Horus's eye lost its blood, so filling the altar depression with wine represented rejuvenation.

In another myth, when the rule of sun god Ra was coming to an end, he sent his daughter Hathor – in the form of Sekhmet, a lion-headed warrior – to destroy the mortals who'd conspired against him. Sekhmet got carried away, and looked set to destroy all of humanity, so Ra and the other gods devised a strategy to stop her. They poured red-dyed beer, or wine, to create lakes throughout the land. Believing that these pools were filled with blood, Sekhmet quaffed them, became intoxicated and fell asleep. In another version of the tale, her wrath was quelled using the power of music, dance and wine.

Recalling this story, at a new year Festival of Drunkenness people celebrated and re-enacted the god's plan that saved humanity, while also being sure to appease the wrathful goddess.

Other deities were honoured with wine, not least Shesmu, god of the wine press. Texts from the third millennium BC record a feast during which grapes were pressed as the people sang that god's name. Because red wine looked similar to blood, Shesmu came to be associated with punishment for serious crimes. In coffin texts and one discovered papyrus, Shesmu fills his wine press not with grapes but with the heads of criminals, then squeezes them into agonising oblivion for their unforgivable sins.

GETTY IMAGES

ROYAL CEREMONY

Pharaoh’s finest

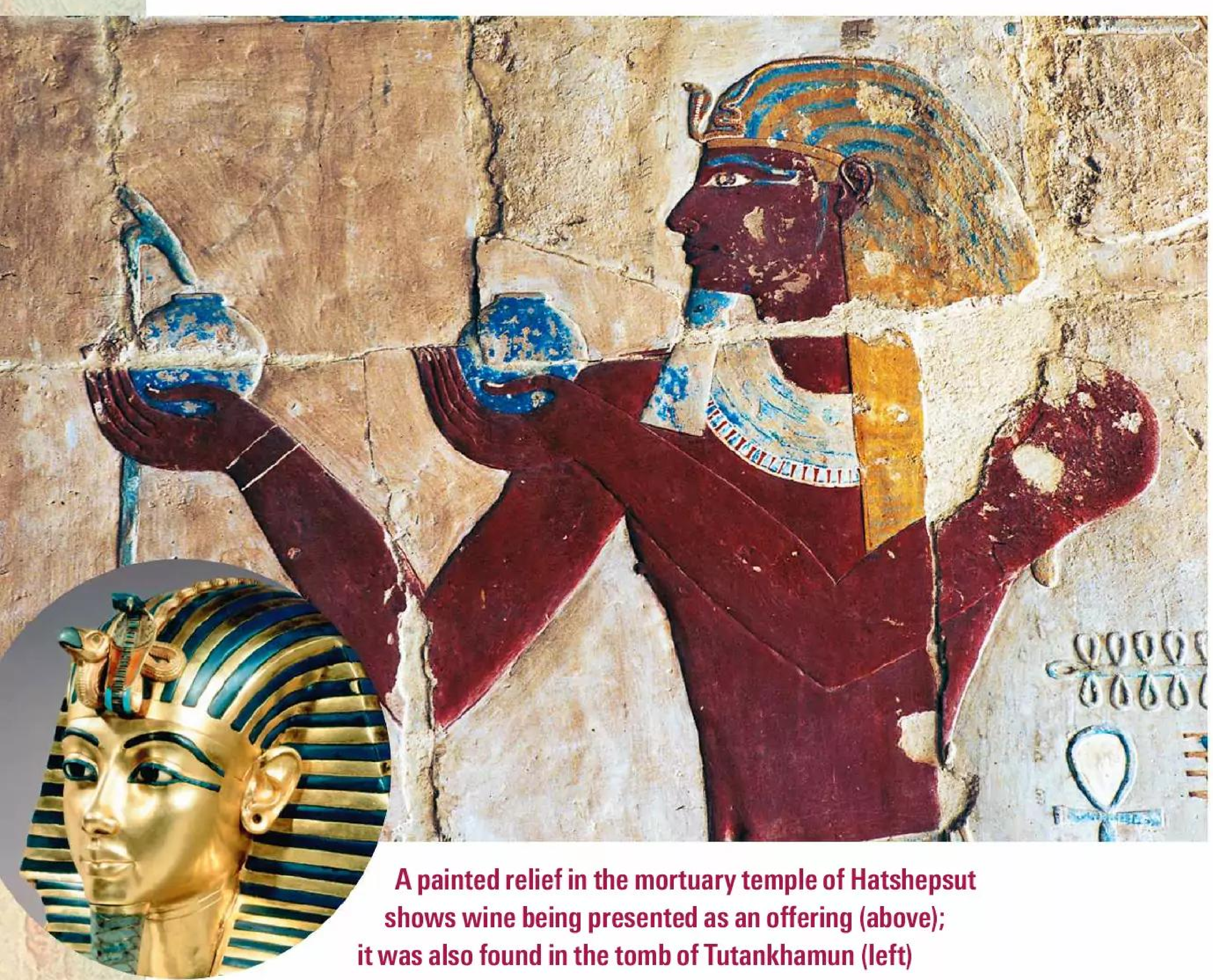
In ancient Egyptian texts, the pharaoh is variously described as a “winegrower” and “brewer”, as well as the “cupbearer” to the gods. And around 400 scenes depicting wine offerings are found in temples from the Greco-Roman period, especially near wine-producing locations. These show pharaohs using wine to get closer to the gods and to bless the lands.

For example, in the Temple of Dendera, on the Nile north of Luxor, an illustration alongside the inscription “good wine, I pour it on the ground” shows a cup being tilted downwards, its liquid flowing out in zigzags. And the Temple of Abydos to the west features a clear depiction of Pharaoh Seti I making an offering to Osiris.

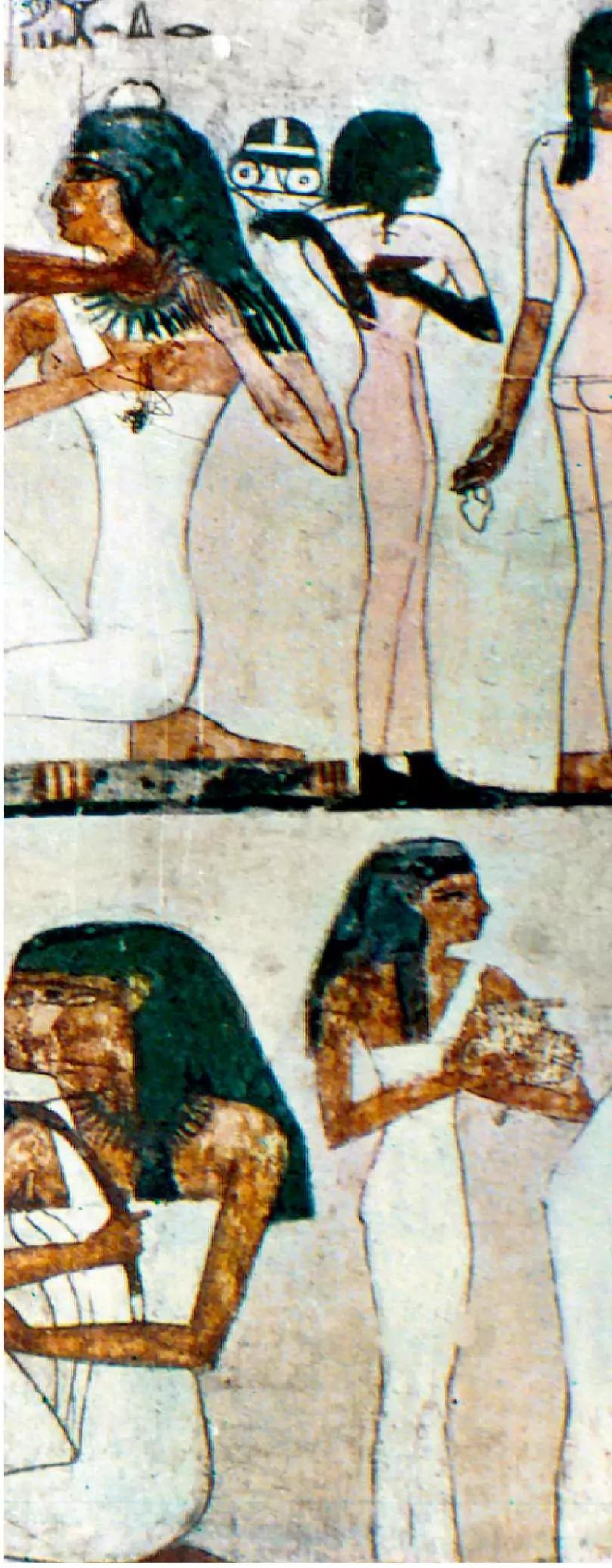
The grapevine – which grows fresh leaves and appears renewed each year – was an important item in funerary rituals, too, increasing a deceased person’s chances of resurrection. When a pharaoh was laid to rest, their tomb was filled with enough wine to take into the afterlife, either in real jars or in the form of wall paintings. Wine was placed in tombs as early as the fourth millennium BC – for example, in the resting place of Scorpion I (c3250 BC).

Among the 5,398 items found in the tomb of Tutankhamun were jars of wine inscribed with the winemaker’s name and the year of production, indicating a sophisticated wine culture. These included eight jars of the most exclusive variety, *shedeh*.

Analysis of the residues in these vessels revealed that they’d contained both red and white wines. Some wines, oils and foods were stored in the annex but, notably, two wine jars were placed alongside Tutankhamun’s body in the burial chamber. The red wine was placed to the west of his remains, while the white wine was set to the east, suggesting that this placement was an essential part of the burial ritual and held huge symbolic value, representing regeneration and rebirth.



A painted relief in the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut shows wine being presented as an offering (above); it was also found in the tomb of Tutankhamun (left)



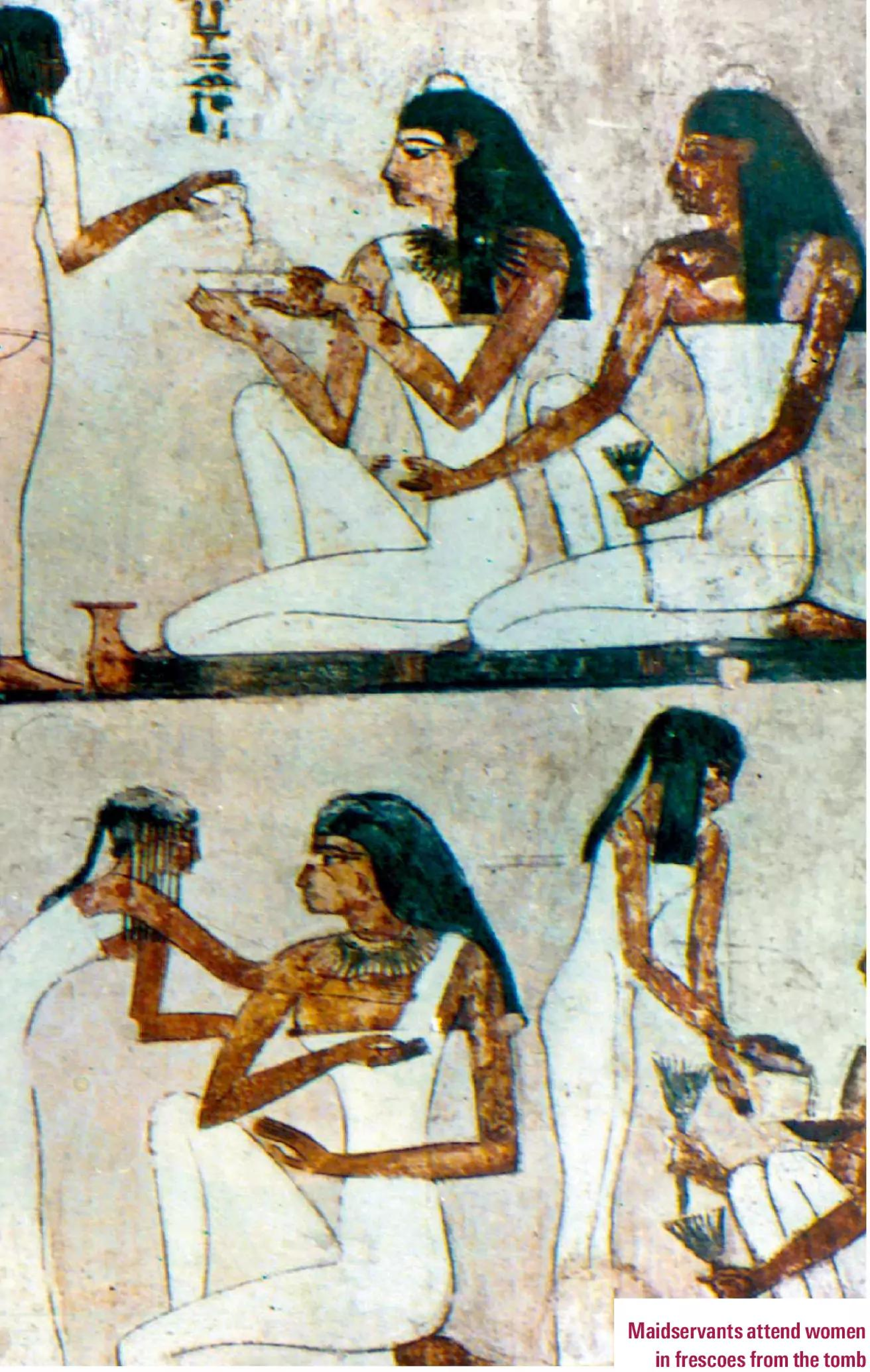
MEDICINE & MUMMIFICATION

Doctoring drinks

Wine was an ingredient in medicinal recipes from the fourth millennium BC. Evidence from papyri reveals that its uses varied widely: in treating infections, as an anaesthetic, applied to wounds as an antiseptic, mixed with herbs to create a sedative. As Greek influence in Egypt increased, the theories of Hippocrates (c460–c375 BC) spread – including that wine was a useful cooling agent for fevers, and that it could be used to nourish the body, purge sadness and help urine flow.

Wine jars retaining residues of herbs and balms have been discovered. Medicinal plants were added to create infused wines, or elixirs: fenugreek to treat fevers and

BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY



Maidservants attend women in frescoes from the tomb of Rekhmire (c1400 BC). Wine was an ingredient in medicines used to ease pains and ailments afflicting women

indigestion, honey to make an antibiotic, mandrake as a narcotic and, under the instruction of a priest, opium as a sedative.

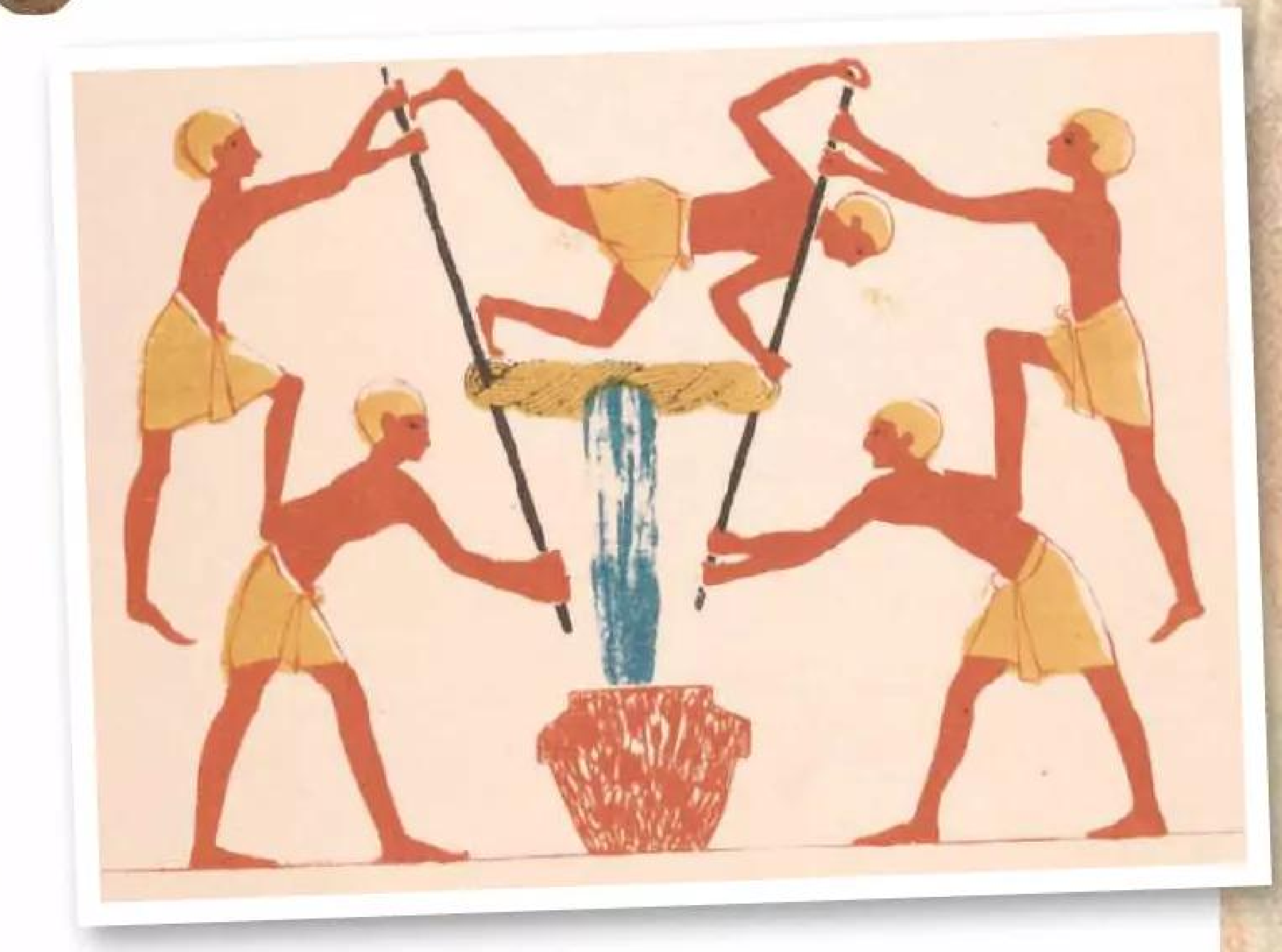
Coriander-infused wine was consumed by women to ease menstrual pain. Wine was mixed with water to make cleansing vaginal douches, with myrrh sometimes added as an antiseptic. It was even used in a kind of pregnancy test referenced in a papyrus dating from 1550 BC, which explains how a doctor should mix a urine sample with wine. A reaction between the fermented liquid and the urine's chemical compounds would indicate that a baby was on the way.

Wine also became a key component of the embalming process, which was believed to guarantee a better afterlife. After most internal organs had been scooped out of a cadaver in preparation for mummification, it was cleansed thoroughly with a mixture of water and wine. The retained organs – stomach, intestines, liver and lungs – were also washed with wine ready for dehydration. This inhibited bacterial growth, slowing decomposition.

ALAMY

INNOVATIONS & INVENTIONS

Wine-powered wonders



Egyptian workers press grapes in a later illustration based on a tomb painting

After the Ptolemies moved Egypt's capital to Alexandria in the late fourth century BC, the state began organising grandiose festivals – demonstrations of power and wealth. These aimed to deter potential invaders and boosted the economy, with traders travelling to the city from far and wide during festival season.

We have a fascinating first-hand account by Callixenus of Rhodes, who likely lived in the second or third century BC and whose original writing – now lost – was quoted by the Greek writer Athenaeus a few centuries later. He described a magnificent and highly choreographed festival featuring performances by *sileni*, the drunken followers of Dionysus, Greek god of wine. An incredible float pulled by 300 men carried a wine press measuring 11 by 7 metres, dispensing local wine to the cheering crowds.

Such mechanical innovations were possible thanks to scholars at the city's Great Library. Third-century BC inventor Ctesibius of Alexandria even devised singing statues. One of these, which depicted Arsinoë II (who co-ruled Egypt with her brother and husband Ptolemy II) as the goddess Aphrodite, played music as wine flowed out. He may also have created a hydraulic pump to transfer wine.

Working in the first or second century AD, Heron (or Hero) of Alexandria produced more such innovations; his *Pneumatica* contained no fewer than 16 wine-related inventions. He created the first vending machine, which dispensed measured amounts of liquid when a coin was inserted, and a self-filling wine bowl. He also invented a vessel with multiple spouts that alternately poured water and wine, or a mixture. So in Alexandria, water could indeed be turned into wine. **H**

Islam Issa is a writer, broadcaster and professor of literature and history at Birmingham City University. His latest book is *Alexandria: The City that Changed the World* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2023)

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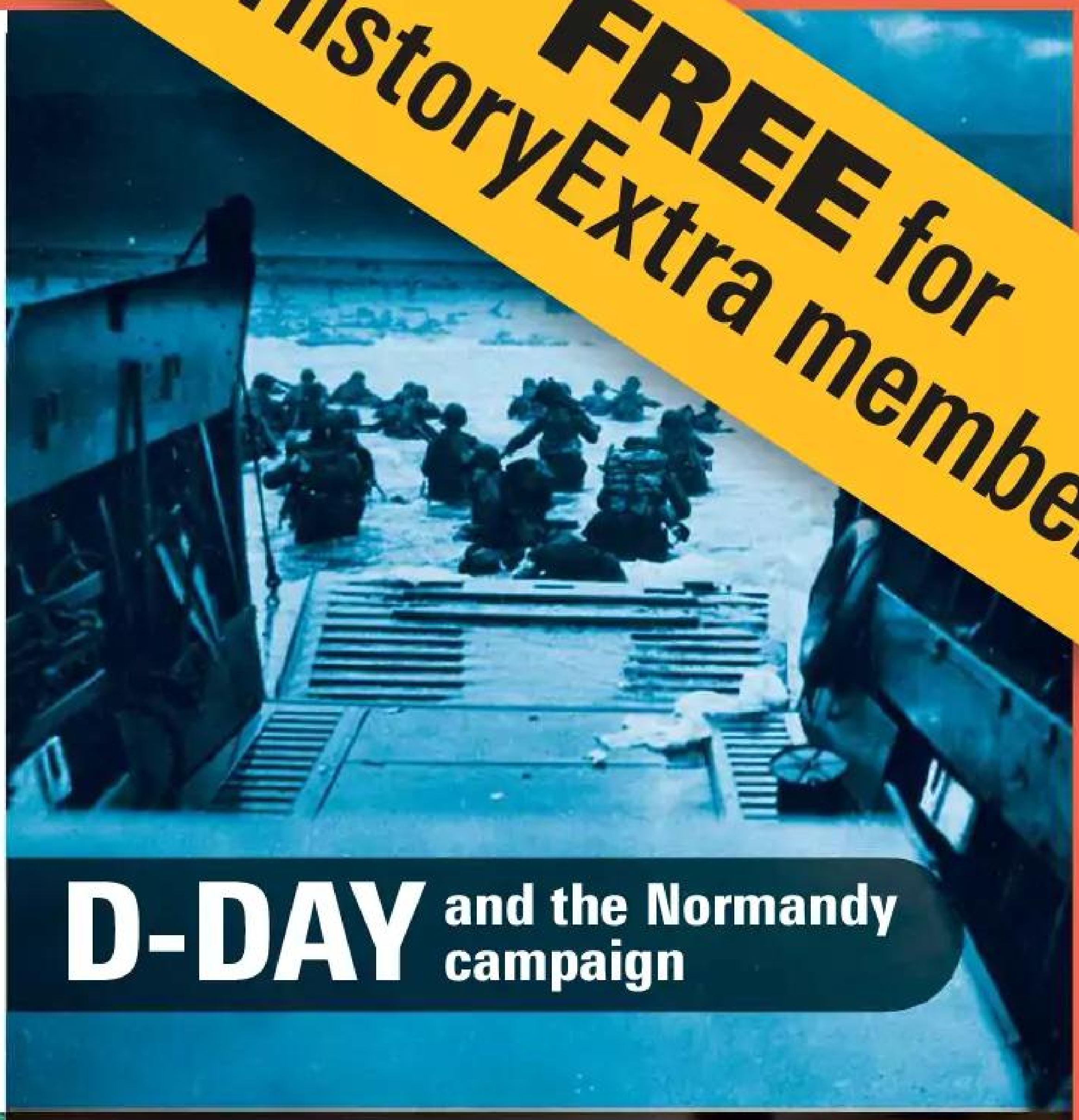
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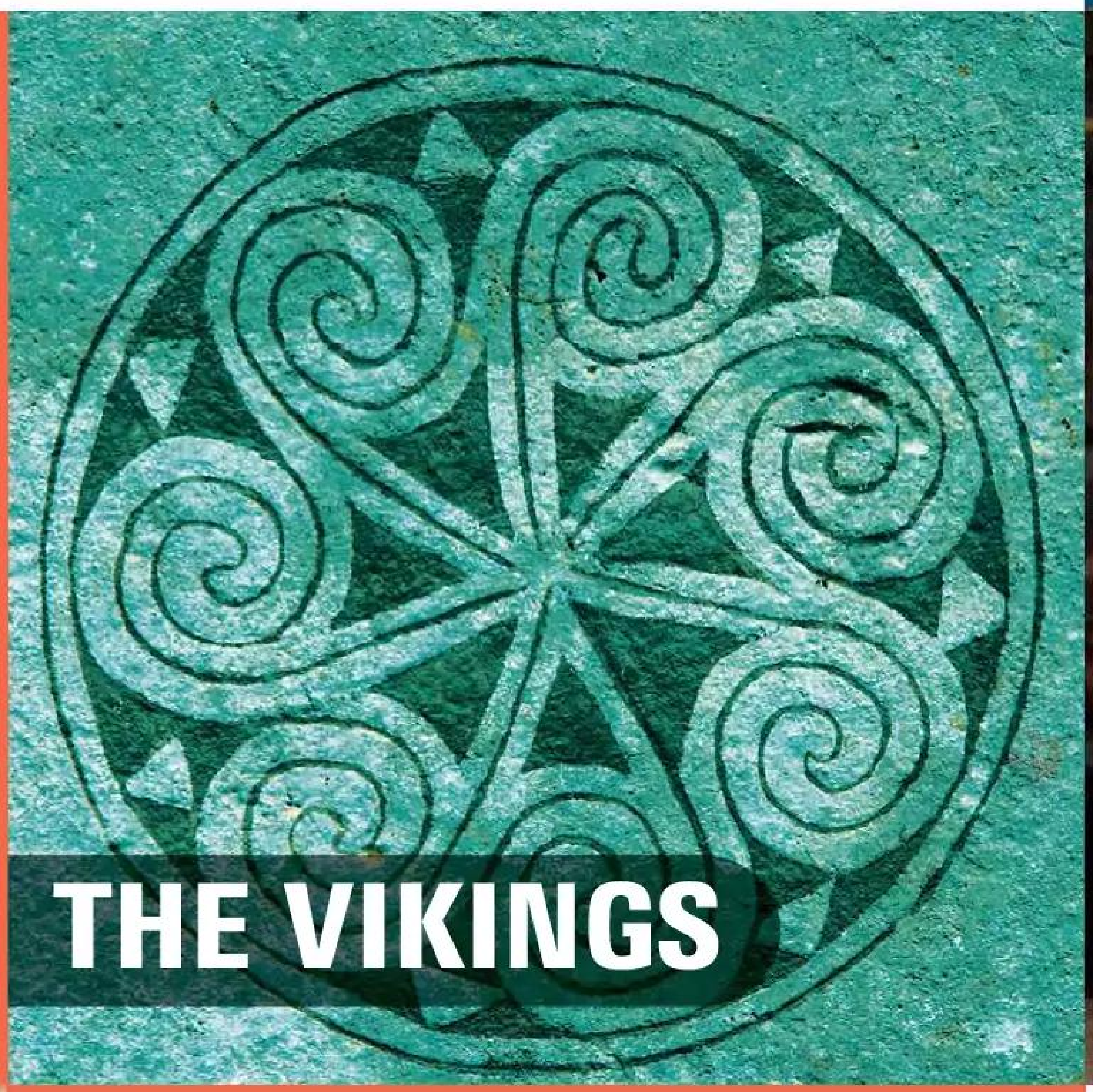
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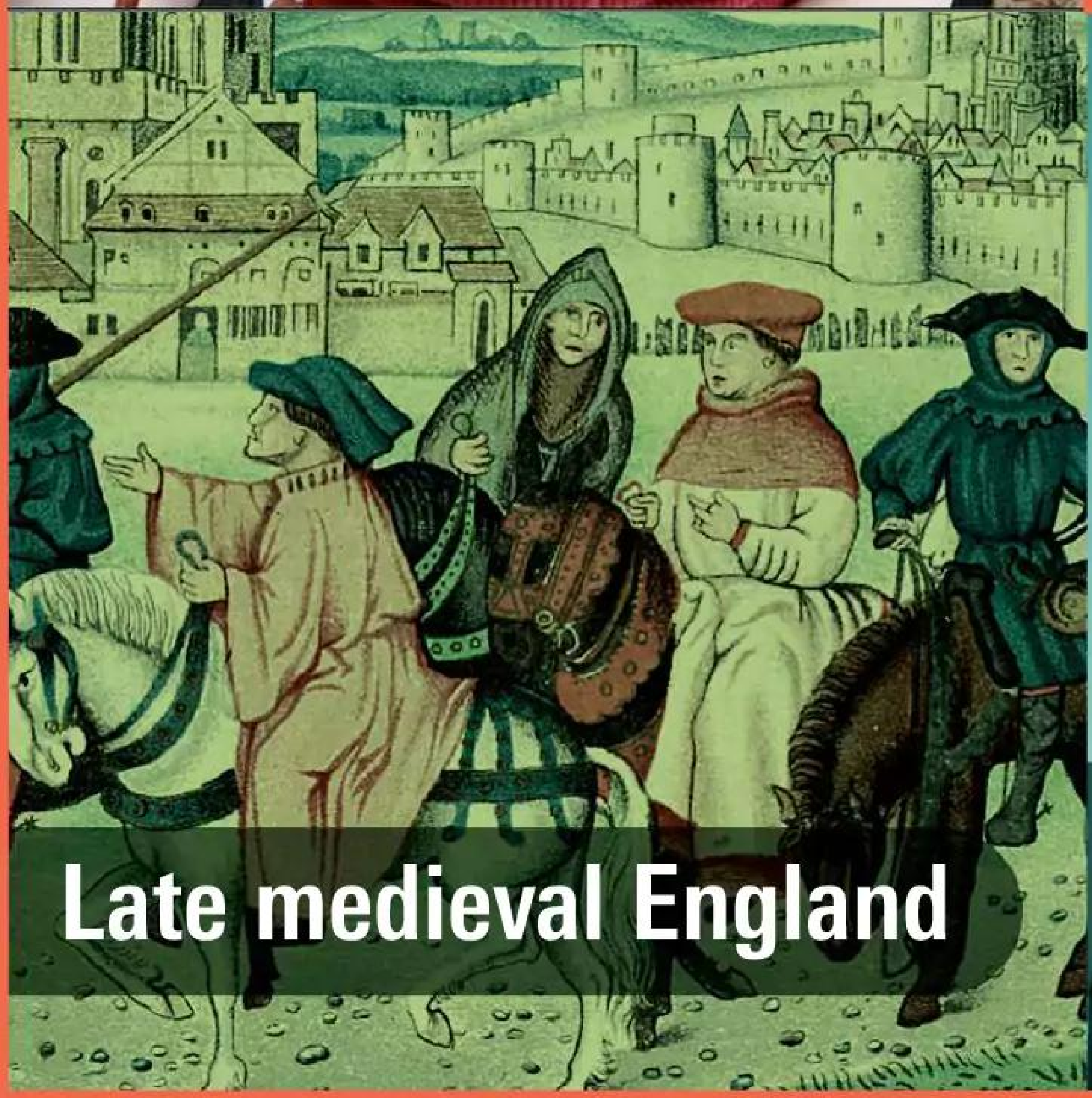
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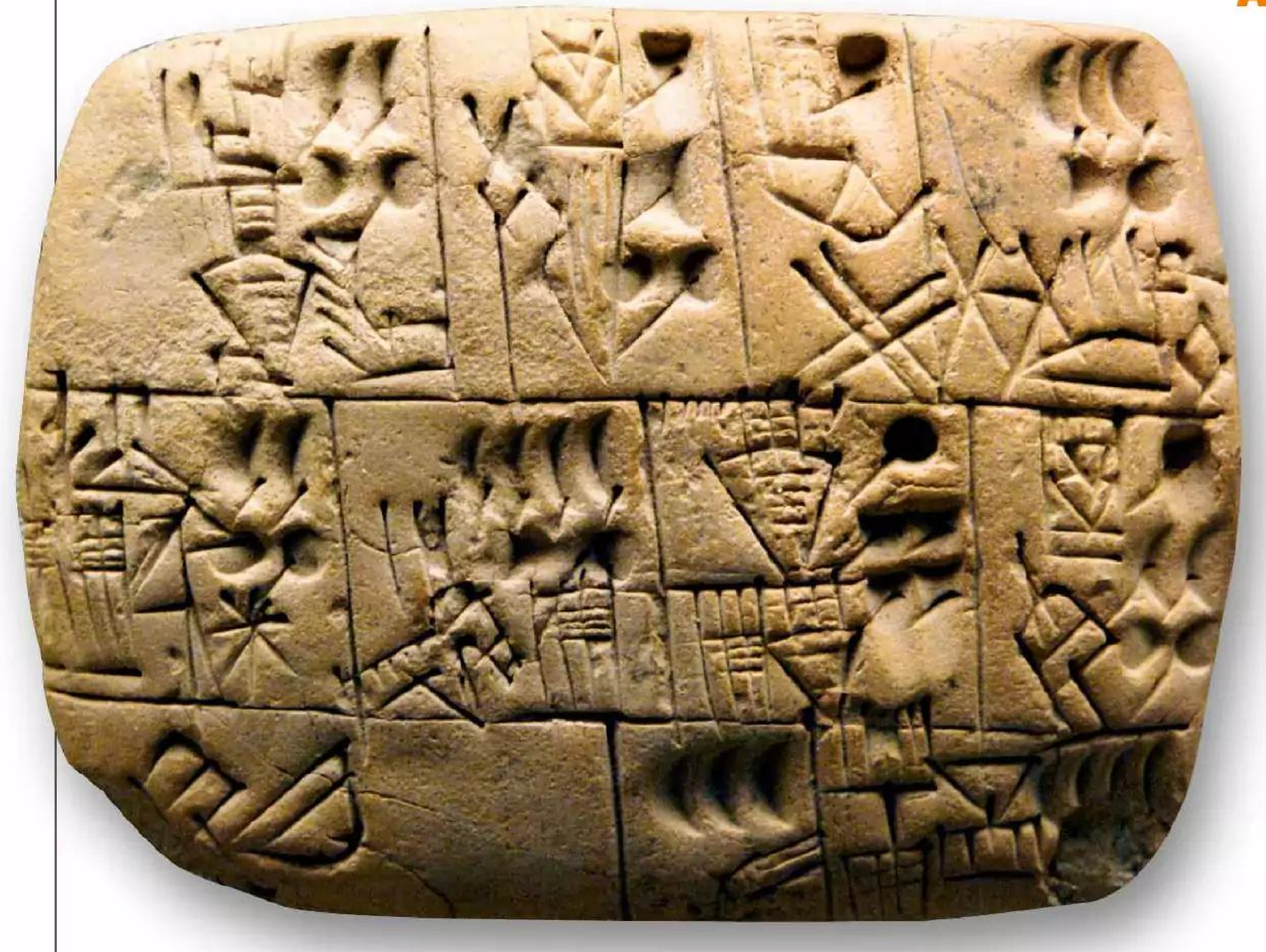
"The devastation wrought by the peasant bands was utterly unprecedented"

Mark Stoyle appraises a new account of a dramatic 16th-century uprising › page 78



ANCIENT

"Cosmology itself constitutes a form of history that interweaves past and present"

Gojko Barjamovic is impressed by a book examining how history was recorded and perceived in ancient Mesopotamia › page 76

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"The Americans were determined to make the defeat of Japan their own project"

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"In the last 10 years of the Cold War, large numbers of forbidden texts were smuggled into Poland"

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INTERVIEW

Philippe Sands on former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet's arrest in London in 1998

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“She said: ‘If you represent Pinochet in this case, I will divorce you’”

PHILIPPE SANDS tells Rob Attar about his involvement in the sensational trial of the Chilean dictator, and how it connects to a Nazi on the run

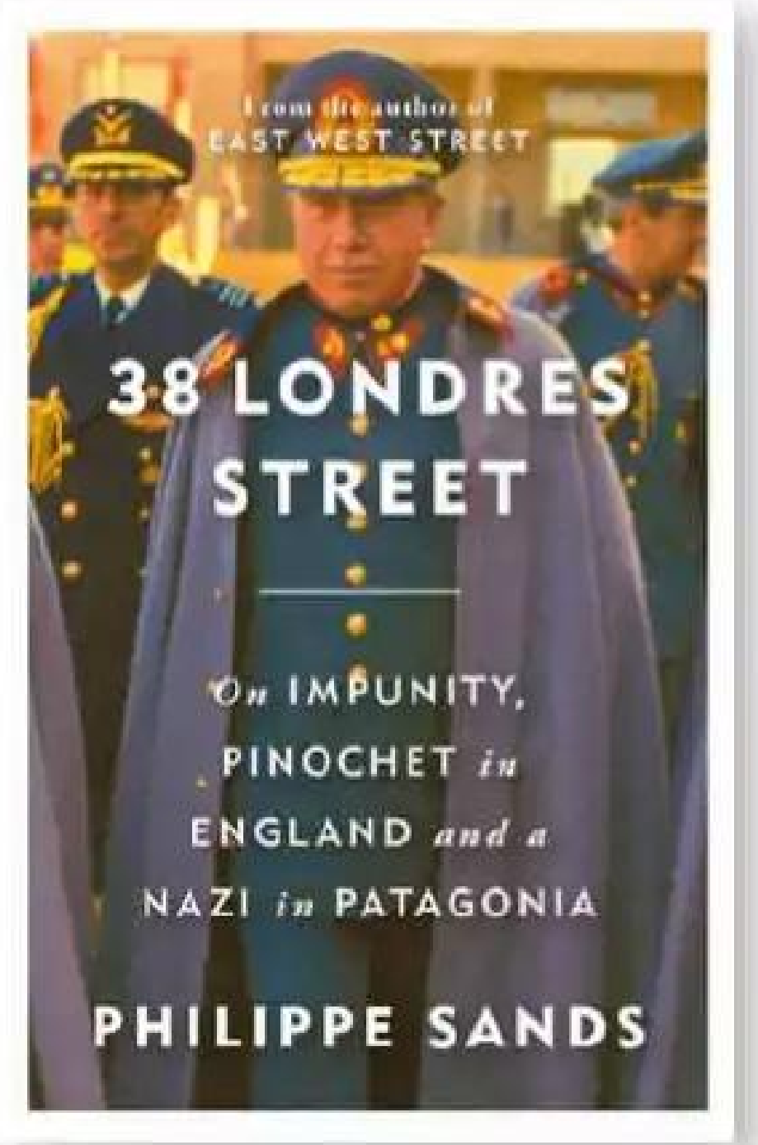
Rob Attar: In 1998, the former dictator of Chile, Augusto Pinochet, was arrested in London. How seismic a moment was this?

Philippe Sands: I remember the moment of learning of Pinochet’s arrest. It was a Saturday afternoon. It happened to be my birthday, and I was settling down to watch the football results at five o’clock when the news came on and they announced that Augusto Pinochet had been arrested for murder and crimes against humanity. It was huge. It was the first time that a former head of state, while travelling abroad, had been arrested on international crimes.

Someone not familiar with the story might wonder why this was happening in London, not Santiago. What can you tell us about the geography of these events?

By way of background, in September 1973 Augusto Pinochet, head of the Chilean military, seized power in a coup d’etat and remained there for 17 years. Over that period, hundreds of thousands were arrested, tens of thousands were tortured and ‘disappeared’, and many remain so to this day. There are about 1,300 people unaccounted for.

This had attracted considerable interest around the world, because these are actions that would be characterised as international crimes within the meaning of the 1945 Nuremberg trials and definitions. And that is coupled with a principle known as universal jurisdiction, where when certain crimes take place, the courts of any country in the world may exercise jurisdiction. In October 1998 a Spanish judge named Baltasar Garzón decided to issue an arrest warrant for Senator Pinochet, while he was in London receiving medical treatment, for international crimes. That was the start of this part of the story.


From the author of EAST WEST STREET
38 LONDRES STREET
On IMPUNITY, PINOCHET in ENGLAND and a NAZI in PATAGONIA
PHILIPPE SANDS

38 Londres Street: On Impunity, Pinochet in England and a Nazi in Patagonia
by Philippe Sands
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 480 pages, £25)

The connection with Spain is interesting because Pinochet’s relationship with the west was quite complex. He had a lot of friends in western countries, particularly America and Britain, for example.

Pinochet did indeed have friends, on the political right, in the United States and in Britain. He was a good friend of Margaret Thatcher, and, in fact, shortly before he was arrested, they spent time together. Spain had also long had an interest in him, because many Chilean refugees who had fled his regime ended up in Spain, and indeed it was the relations and descendants of some of his victims in Spain who went to the legal authorities and got the proceedings up and running.

To put this in its broader context, for people in Spain who had been opposed to General Franco, there was a connection between Franco and Pinochet. And, in fact, Pinochet was one of the very few international leaders to attend Franco’s funeral. For many people in Spain, if you were for or against Franco, you were also for or against Pinochet.

How did you become involved in this case?

After Pinochet was arrested, I did what everyone else did, which was to follow the news with great interest. I am a teacher of international law, so this was fascinating for me. I did a few newspaper interviews and a couple for the BBC, and then I went off to Paris for a day to attend a ceremony at the grave of my grandfather, who had recently died.

As I was leaving my hotel, I received a phone call from my barristers’ chambers saying that Senator Pinochet’s lawyers had been in touch, and that they would like to instruct me to be part of the team arguing that, as a former head of state, he had complete immunity from the jurisdiction of the English courts – including in relation to international crime. Because I was off to the cemetery, I said: “I need to call you back tomorrow once I’m back in London.”

I got to the cemetery and there met my wife who had come in separately. She has a Spanish mother and is descended from refugees from the civil war in Spain. So these issues are pertinent in her family. I explained to her what had happened. To be honest, I told her with some excitement that Pinochet’s lawyers had been in touch and that I might be involved in the case. This was the biggest international criminal case since Nuremberg and that really was rather exciting. And she asked me: “Will you do it?”

I said: “Well, you know the cab rank principle: the rule that requires barristers to take on every case that comes in, just as though you’re a taxi driver. You can’t say no to someone because you don’t like the cut of their jib or their politics. So, yes, I am going to do it.” And she looked at me again and said: “So will you do it?” And I said: “Yes, I’ve got no option but to do it.” She said: “Okay, well, you can if you want to. But if you do it, I will divorce you.” And that, of course, was because of her own family background.

This was 25 years ago, and we are still very happily married. So I opted against divorce and against acting for Pinochet, and thought that that was the end of the matter. But then, about four days later, the other side came along, Human Rights Watch, and said we would like to instruct you, and I acted for them as counsel.

ANTONIO OLMOS

PROFILE

Philippe Sands is professor of public understanding of law at UCL, visiting professor at Harvard Law School and a practising barrister at 11 KBW. He is also the author of numerous books including *East West Street* (2016) and *The Ratline* (2020)

PHOTOGRAPH BY
ANTONIO OLMOS

How were you able to avoid representing Pinochet, considering that cab rank principle?
The beauty of the English Bar is that for every rule there are at least 37 exceptions. And one of them is known as the professional embarrassment exception. About five days before my trip to Paris I was asked to give an interview to Zeinab Badawi for the BBC World Service, and she asked me a series of very well-prepared questions. One of them was: has he got a right to immunity? And I said: "We don't know because this has never happened before. We've never had a case in which a former head of state has turned up in another country and been subjected to the jurisdiction of that country's courts. Frankly I don't know what the English courts will do."

But she pushed and asked me: "What do you think *ought* to happen?" And I said: "I can quite see why you would have immunity for a serving head of state, but I can't really see the logic for a former head of state. So, no, in my view, there should not be an entitlement to immunity." Those words, publicly stated, meant that I would effectively have been arguing for Senator Pinochet in the context of having made a public statement that he should not have immunity. And on that basis, I was able to decline to accept instructions.

So, was the key issue here not so much whether Pinochet was responsible for these crimes, but whether as a former head of state he was immune from prosecution?
In the English proceedings, which lasted for about 18 months, there was no question of making a determination as to whether he was responsible for any of the alleged acts or crimes. That was always going to be a matter for the courts of Spain, if he was extradited. The only issue for the English courts was whether, as a former head of state, he could claim immunity. And that was a completely new situation. We were in untried and untested waters.

What were your experiences of being in court for this case? How different was it from other trials you've witnessed?
I was there every day; I didn't miss a single moment. It ended up being very complex, with three separate proceedings before the House of Lords. And it was like nothing I've experienced before, and nothing I have experienced since. Everyone who was in the room – which was packed with lawyers, observers, journalists and interested bystanders – understood that this was something of huge significance because it would set a precedent at a time when the world was changing and the rules of law were changing.

Each day was electric, even though much of the legal procedure was quite mundane, dull and technical. The fact that people were so divided in the room, the fact that the stakes were so high, and the fact that the arguments were so novel made it unique in my professional experience.

Captured Nazi Walter Rauff pictured during his arrest in 1945. He later escaped from Allied custody and was living in Chile when Pinochet came to power

> **" Walter Rauff was an unrepentant, racist, homophobic antisemite. To the end of his days, he celebrated the birthday of Adolf Hitler "**

The second key character in your book is Walter Rauff, an important figure in the Nazi state who later ended up in Chile. What can you tell us about him?
38 Londres Street tells two stories in parallel. I'd been involved in the Pinochet case from 1998 to 2000, and about 15 years later I started working on a book called *The Ratline*, where the main protagonist is a man called Otto Wächter, a senior Nazi who was responsible for mass murder in occupied Poland, including the city of Lviv, where my grandfather was from. He'd had a role in the elimination of my grandfather's entire family. I was doing some archival research and came across a letter written in May 1949 to Wächter from someone living in Damascus, Syria. And the writer of the letter was Walter Rauff, whose name was vaguely familiar to me, but I wasn't sure why.

I started doing some research and quickly learned that Walter Rauff was the man who operated, invented and ran the mobile gas vans that were used in 1941 and 1942 in Nazi-occupied Europe to eliminate groups of up to 50 people at a time, by locking them in the back of a van and gassing them to death. He had been hunted after the war for mass murder, but had escaped and disappeared. I carried on reading and learned that Rauff had ended up in Chile, living in one of the most southerly towns in the world: Punta Arenas.

And the idea arrived in the back of my head: could there be a connection between Walter Rauff and Augusto Pinochet? That became the seed of this book.

It wasn't a secret that Rauff had moved to Chile after the war, so why was he never brought to justice for his role in the Holocaust?
Rauff ended up in Punta Arenas in about 1958, and became the manager of a king crab cannery, processing crab meat for export to Europeans. Then, in December 1962, the West Germans finally caught up with him and they issued an arrest warrant, indicting him for mass murder and sending a request for his extradition from Chile. He was arrested and taken to Santiago where he was subjected to legal proceedings. The issue in his case was not immunity from jurisdiction of the Chilean courts, but whether the Chilean courts had the right to extradite him to West Germany.

In Chile there was a 15-year statute of limitations. In other words, you can't extradite or prosecute someone if more than 15 years has passed since the alleged crime was committed. In this case, more than 15 years *had* passed, and the Chilean Supreme Court ruled by six votes to one in 1963 that he could not be extradited. So Rauff went back to Punta Arenas and resumed his life as the manager of a king crab cannery.

And all this time he remained unrepentant?
He was an unrepentant, racist, homophobic antisemite throughout his entire life. To the end of his days, he celebrated the birthday

ALAMY

Cruel era Pinochet (centre) pictured in Santiago in September 1973 shortly after seizing power in a military coup. Over the following 17 years, his regime would torture and 'disappear' tens of thousands of Chileans

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A dictator on trial Hear more of this interview with Philippe Sands on our podcast: *historyextra.com/pinochet-pod*

of Adolf Hitler and longed for a return to the good old days. So I think we can conclude he was not a delightful individual with the kind of values and views we can celebrate. On the other hand, I've come to know his grandchildren, who describe a decent and loving grandfather.

He was the most famous Nazi living in Chile, and after the proceedings in Santiago, when he returned to Punta Arenas, everyone knew who he was, and that did not stop many of them from taking him to their breasts and showing friendship. I've met some of the people he employed in that period. They describe a stern, unbending individual who treated his workers well and with respect, but was prone to rages and fury and had strongly held political views.

A central question of your book is whether Rauff became involved in the repressive apparatus of the Pinochet regime. I won't ask you to give away your conclusion, but could you tell us about the kinds of things that took place at the time?

The year after Pinochet took power, he created a secret intelligence service called the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA). And the DINA was authorised to do anything necessary to take out opponents of the regime, including to kill or to disappear them. The DINA established a series of detention centres and torture centres and places of disappearance. These were not only in obscure places; many of them were in downtown Santiago. And in fact, the one that gives the book its title is in a small street in central Santiago. Number 38 was the former headquarters of the Socialist Party.

It is a central place in relation to Pinochet's apparatus, and, without giving too much away, the events there and what certain detainees saw or heard became an absolutely crucial part of the story in relation to whether Walter Rauff had any role in all of this.

Why was it so important for you to establish whether Rauff was involved in Pinochet's repressions?

Maybe because I'm an obsessive. In my own household, years ago, people wanted me to stop talking about Rauff because they were sick to death of it. But I think it's that litigator's instinct: you have a sort of sixth sense that there is something there and you can't let go. You leave no stone unturned in wanting to get to the truth.

There's the expression 'there's no smoke without fire', and there was too much smoke. There were too many people who said to me: "I saw him", or "I heard him", or "I heard word of him", and I needed to get to the heart of those claims. In the end I did, but it was immensely time-consuming.

My first interview for the book, which was with Baltasar Garzón, the Spanish judge, was in 2015. We're now in 2025 and the book is just about to come out. So it was a 10-year investigation. And it was a double investigation. I was looking not only at the question of whether there had been a connection between Rauff and Pinochet, but also looking for the answer to another question: how did Pinochet end up back in Chile?

Because, coming back to the earlier part of our conversation, the Pinochet case lasted a very long time before the English courts. And in the end, things took a strange turn. There were allegations that the old man had fallen ill. He couldn't face trial and he must go home. My instinct was that some sort of a deal had been done to get him back, but there was no evidence of any deal. And so essentially I went on a double investigative path. Was there a deal to get Pinochet home? Did Pinochet work with Rauff? And that double story reaches a climax only right at the end of the book.

There are two words that come through a lot in your book: 'immunity' and 'impunity'. How far do the stories of Pinochet and Rauff illuminate those concepts?

The concepts of immunity and impunity are very significant for our times. Immunity connotes a sort of freedom from being subjected to criminal or legal process or prosecution. And impunity connotes a total absence of justice. And I think in the case of Walter Rauff, who was involved in mass murder and never held to account, the case of impunity reigns absolutely.

The case of Augusto Pinochet is more complex. He did not succeed in his claim to immunity and so the proceedings went on. But, for reasons I describe in the book, he was eventually allowed to leave the United Kingdom and go back to Santiago early. He never was sent to Spain, though the idea was that he would face justice in Chile, and to a certain extent he did. At the time of his death in 2006 he was indicted, he was under house arrest, his reputation was in tatters. So that is not an example of total impunity. But he was never convicted of a crime – and, for many, that still remains a very painful fact. H

Human cost Citizens among the wreckage of Tokyo, following the US firebombing of 9–10 March 1945. "The Americans were determined to make the defeat of Japan their own project," writes Aaron William Moore

WWII

Fire from the sky

AARON WILLIAM MOORE is impressed by a considered and inclusive account of the US bombing of Japanese civilians during the Second World War

RICHARD OVERY
RAIN OF RUIN
TOKYO, HIROSHIMA AND THE SURRENDER OF JAPAN

Rain of Ruin: Tokyo, Hiroshima and the Surrender of Japan
by Richard Overy
Allen Lane, 224 pages, £25

Richard Overy is one of the best scholars of the history of Second World War bombing, so I was pleased to see him take up the topic of the air war against Japan.

Debates around the morality of targeting civilians, the use of atomic weaponry and the principal cause of Japan's surrender continue to vex historians, but Overy has avoided many of the usual pitfalls by engaging with the Japanese side of the story. *Rain of Ruin* lucidly explains the rapid rise of air power leading up to the Second World War and continues on to its culmination in the astonishing brutality of the atomic bomb in 1945.

Some readers will be surprised at how slowly countries such as Britain and the US reacted to the threat of aerial bombardment. Many of those things we take to be iconic armaments of the war – notably the B-29 bomber and atomic weapons – were introduced only later in the conflict, at enormous costs, and with many problems. "By early 1944," Overy reminds readers, "only 16 B-29s were operational out of 97 delivered by the Boeing factories, though eventually 3,760 would be produced at a final cost of almost $4bn" – more than the cost of the atomic bombs.

The US learned much from the earlier RAF campaigns against Germany, making the destruction of Japanese cities in a certain sense an extension of the European conflict. A revelation that will likely be even more surprising to readers will be the British efforts to contribute to the bombing of Japanese cities. Air Chief Marshal Charles Portal wrote at the time that "the British were keen to get at the Japanese 'in their

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> **“The debate over the morality of Allied mass killing of civilians in the Second World War will probably go on forever”**

home country’”, reflecting the eagerness of Winston Churchill for the Commonwealth to do its part in the purposeful killing of Japanese civilians. Ultimately, the Americans were determined to make the defeat of Japan their own project, and declined to include the RAF in the bombing.

The story of scientific ‘triumph’ in the development of atomic weapons will be very familiar by now. However, Overy observes – correctly, in my view – that the “kudos attached to solving the challenge and demonstrating the outcome to the wider world shielded scientists and decision-makers from the harsh reality of what a bomb could do”.

Later realisation of the weapon’s inhumanity triggered reactions of horror, including the feverish nightmare depicted in the film *Oppenheimer* (2023) – notably the only instance in the movie in which the Japanese people are seen.

Historical erasure

Most English-language publications looking at the war have ignored the experiences of the Japanese people. Ran Zwigenberg (in his 2023 book *Nuclear Minds*) and I have called attention to this problem when we critiqued Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Bomber Mafia* (2021), but it is unfair to focus solely on that book, which only amplified a larger problem in the historical profession’s overall erasure of Japanese civilians.

Though the main focus of Overy’s book is still his area of expertise – the military and political calculations behind the development of strategic bombing – he includes Japanese accounts, such as Tsukiyama Mihoro’s vivid description of the Second World War air conflict’s inhumane and indiscriminate nature.

It has been 30 years since John Dower wrote his article ‘Triumphal and Tragic Narratives of the War in Asia’ in the *Journal of American History*, but our commitment to the narrative of the ‘good war’ is unwavering – immune not only to the work of Japanese historians but even to that of American critics including John Bodnar (*The ‘Good War’ in American Memory*, 2010).

There are many nuanced discussions of Second World War bombing of European civilians, such as Dietmar Süss’s excellent 2014 volume *Death from the Skies*, so why is our treatment of Japan so stubbornly different? Though it is understandable that scholars unable to read Japanese might overlook civilian accounts, in some cases historians have based their analyses of ‘why Japan surrendered’ almost entirely on the assessments of the US political and military elites; this strikes historians of Japan, including me, as rather extraordinary. The air war and the Japanese decision to surrender are difficult topics to navigate, but *Rain of Ruin* takes into consideration the perspective of Japanese historians through the years.

Some readers might be dissatisfied with Overy’s final assessment that “the equation ‘bombing equals surrender’ in the end begs too many questions”. Most historians are not so cautious, however, passing over the complexity of the Japanese wartime political and social system or contemptuously dismissing postwar debates about the surrender process. In far too many books, the uniformly fanatical resistance of ‘the Japanese’ reflects the monolithic conception of the heroism (or genius) that ‘the Americans’ possessed.

Perhaps the problem is simply one of historical memory and the contradictions of the Cold War’s ‘Pax Americana’. The debate over the morality of Allied mass killing of civilians in the Second World War will probably go on forever, relying on the “ambiguous wording and broad interpretations” of prewar laws and conventions that countenanced such tactics in the first place.

Perhaps historians will simply settle on the morality of bombing as “begging too many questions” or take the position that, as Keith Lowe wrote in *Inferno* (2007), “My main intention has never been to judge events of the past, only to offer a reminder that they happened.” As Overy’s careful tone shows, however, even 80 years later, reminding the public that Japanese non-combatants were systematically and purposefully killed is itself somehow controversial.

Rain of Ruin shows that there is an opportunity for a course-correction in how we talk about Japan in the Second World War – if we wish to take it. H

Aaron William Moore is Handa chair of Japanese-Chinese relations at the University of Edinburgh

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ON THE PODCAST

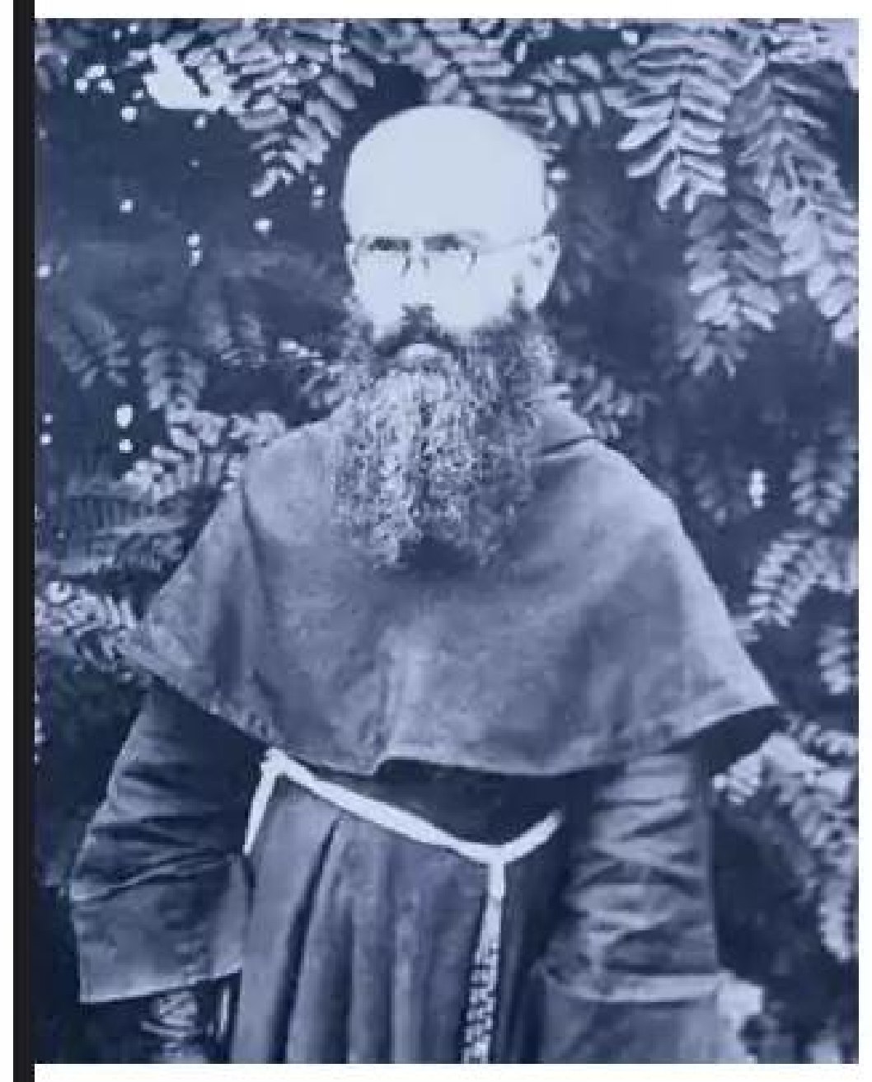
Japan’s desolation and atonement

Content producer **Danny Bird** picks three podcast episodes about Japan’s war experiences

Judgment and reckoning

The Tokyo Trial was the overlooked yet no less fateful counterpart to the proceedings conducted at Nuremberg in which, following their capitulation, Japan’s wartime leaders were tried for war crimes by the Allies. Gary Bass discusses the significance of this case for international law and for Japan as it prepared to chart a new course.
historyextra.com/tokyo-trial-pod

Seeds of hope



The sacrifice made by Catholic priest Maximilian Kolbe (left) at Auschwitz inspired two Japanese men. Tomei Ozaki, a Nagasaki bombing survivor, became a friar, while Masatoshi Asari propagated ideals of peace by gifting cherry trees around the world. Journalist Naoko Abe explains how Kolbe’s example helped postwar Japan rebound from its nadir.
historyextra.com/naoko-abe-pod

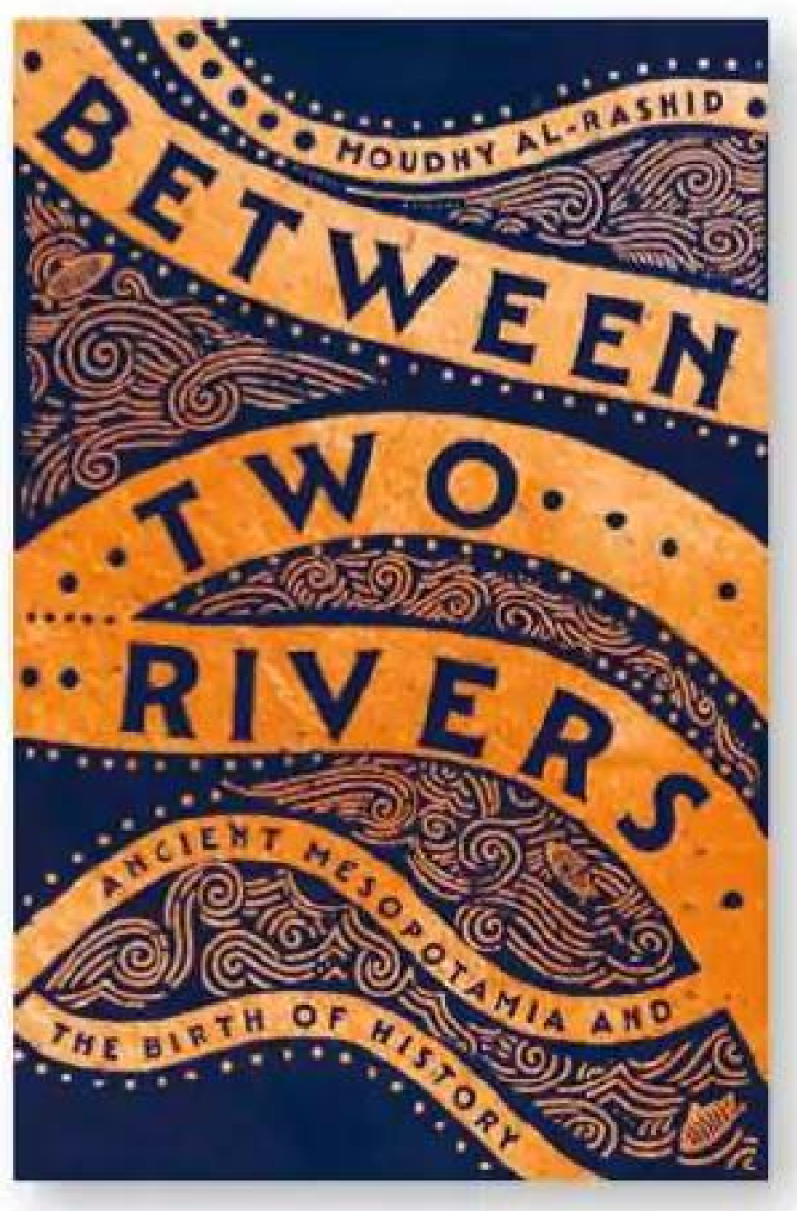
Atomic collateral

When the second atomic bomb obliterated the Japanese city of Nagasaki on 9 August 1945, hundreds of Allied prisoners of war were inside the city. John Willis tells the little-known story of these individuals who, forced to work for Japan’s ailing wartime economy, became witnesses to the final devastating act of the Second World War.
historyextra.com/nagasaki-pows-pod

ANCIENT

Stream of consciousness

GOJKO BARJAMOVIC is swept along on a journey into the distant past that inspires questions about how our forebears viewed their place in the human story



Between Two Rivers: Ancient Mesopotamia and the Birth of History
by Moudhy Al-Rashid
Hodder & Stoughton,
336 pages, £25

What is history, and how do we think about our past on a societal scale? How do we recall and reflect on events of long ago? Our beliefs about the past – down to the origin of the universe and humankind – are more than just theories of what came before us. They are beliefs that actively shape our future, because origin is tied in our mind to present purpose. The past gives form to and serves to justify or critique current reality.

The oldest substantial body of historical writing comes from ancient Mesopotamia, the region of the Tigris and Euphrates river basins. Because its inhabitants wrote on durable clay, they left a broad and vigorous spectrum of writings on a vast range of topics. It is from this astounding pool of sources that Oxford Assyriologist Moudhy Al-Rashid draws a picture of how history was perceived and preserved over time, from the invention of writing c3500 BC to the disappearance of clay documents in the first century AD. "Writing allowed… people to begin to record their own past," she says: "to put into words a collective memory of people, places and events."

With the astounding coverage that her material offers, Al-Rashid gives voice not only to societal leaders and intellectuals but also to those ancestors who are usually silent in history: women, children and the enslaved. She launches her thesis with a discussion of an object that was interpreted as an "ancient museum label" by its excavator, Charles Leonard Woolley, upon its discovery exactly a century ago, and which has recently gained near-meme status as belonging to 'Ennigaldi-Nanna's museum'. She then leads us on a thrilling journey through time, sharing nine interwoven essays that each focuses on a singular object related to the supposed ancient collection and its label.

Al-Rashid explores "the history of history" in Mesopotamia in a highly personal style: how the perceived past was made manifest through public spaces, how it was taught in schools, how collective and coercive displays would present time, and how cosmology itself constitutes a form of history that interweaves past and present.

Writing history Text inscribed on a clay tablet in Mesopotamia around 3100–3000 BC. Such durable sources provide insights into how the past was viewed by ancient people

> **"The author gives voice to those ancestors who are usually silent in history: women, children and the enslaved"**

Exploring the geography of the region, she observes the vagaries of archaeological discovery, and bears witness to how scholars interpret ancient societies – not as neutral curators but as active stakeholders in an ongoing effort to comprehend a past they also take part in creating. This includes the romantic – but ultimately incorrect – notion of the first known public museum.

Al-Rashid's book does not offer up a history of time per se. It finds no occasion to consider whether a society where time is not seen as strictly linear imagines the past in ways different from those who see time as irreversible. We are left to wonder if the introduction of writing as a technology dissociated oral tradition from history from the outset, or whether such concepts developed only gradually. And we find no reference to the conceptualisation of unidirectional time – itself arguably a Mesopotamian invention made towards the tail end of its history – and what this did to the concept of history.

Time will tell whether this could be the subject of a second book by the author, as enjoyable and transformative as this one. H

Gojko Barjamovic is a senior lecturer in near eastern languages and civilisations and senior research scholar at Yale University

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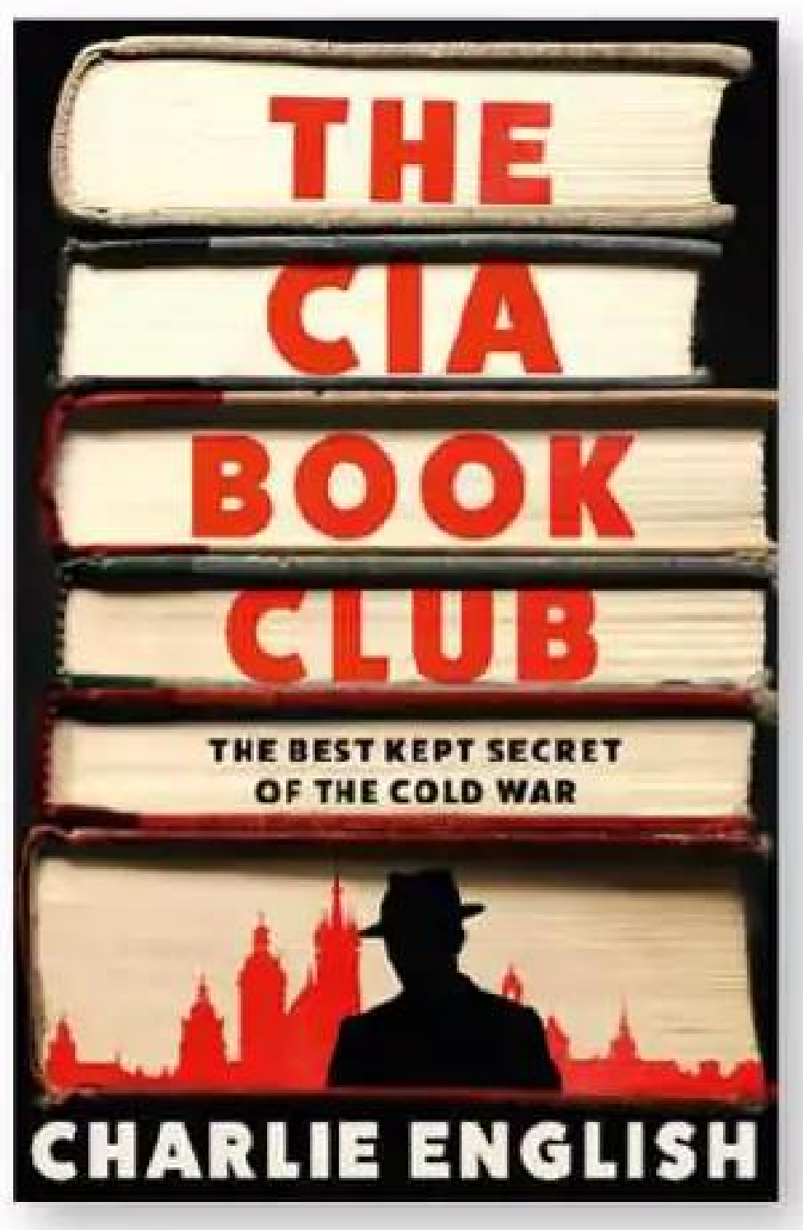
20TH CENTURY

War of words

US efforts to spread democratic ideals through smuggled books make a gripping yarn, says **RICHARD J ALDRICH**


THE CIA BOOK CLUB
THE BEST KEPT SECRET OF THE COLD WAR
CHARLIE ENGLISH

The CIA Book Club: The Best-Kept Secret of the Cold War
by Charlie English
William Collins, 304 pages, £25

In 1980, Ronald Reagan, campaigning for the American presidency, promised that, if elected, he would “unleash” the CIA, making it central to his aggressive new anti-Soviet foreign policy. But few imagined that this might include the smuggling of books by Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, Albert Camus and Hannah Arendt – even Agatha Christie.

The CIA Book Club reveals the remarkable story of the ambitious “books program”, developed during the turbulent last 10 years of the Cold War, which involved moving large numbers of forbidden texts into Poland – millions of items were dispatched, in fact. The CIA had been engaged in these sorts of projects all the way across eastern Europe for decades, but now this accelerated activity converged with the ‘Third Wave’ of democracy. Propelled by burgeoning information flows, it spread across the wider world.

The CIA’s interventions in art, music, journalism and literature have been much debated. When they were first revealed, their key architect, Thomas Braden, declared brazenly: “I am glad the CIA is immoral.”

Other participants described these programmes as a “liberal conspiracy” and judged them favourably. But in 2000, the British investigative journalist Frances Stonor Saunders accused the CIA of the large-scale covert manipulation of cultural production – something she felt should have been left alone. Since then, academics including Hugh Wilford, Scott Lucas and Helen Laville have accepted Saunders’ contention that the US was ideologically aggressive, though they roundly rejected her puppet-master thesis.

The CIA and the KGB are widely associated with Cold War fighting – much of it across the global south, in countries such as Iran, Guatemala, Cuba, Indonesia, Angola and Afghanistan – but this book reveals a different facet. Many covert actions involved money, propaganda and subtle “event shaping”, together with the promotion of democracy, latterly even against erstwhile allies of the US such as Filipino dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

English’s exciting and well-documented study argues that those promoting Polish democracy were independent-minded, often circulating their own local material, having been secretly supplied with printing presses, paper and ink. Mirosław Chojecki, who was perhaps the Americans’ central collaborator within Solidarity, became an important publisher in his own right. In 1980, he created a special bulletin to support workers striking in Gdańsk. He then fled to Paris, where the CIA supported his exiled operations.

The CIA Book Club was not the “best-kept secret of the Cold War” but it *is* one of the best stories. English has done a good job of interviewing the surviving dissidents and producing a detailed social history of the cultural struggle that accompanied the communist regime’s demise.

Of course, the overall tone of the book is influenced by the happy outcome in Poland. Other pioneers of democratic freedom who were also encouraged by the CIA in previous decades, including in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, endured a rather different fate. **H**

Richard J Aldrich is professor of international security at the University of Warwick

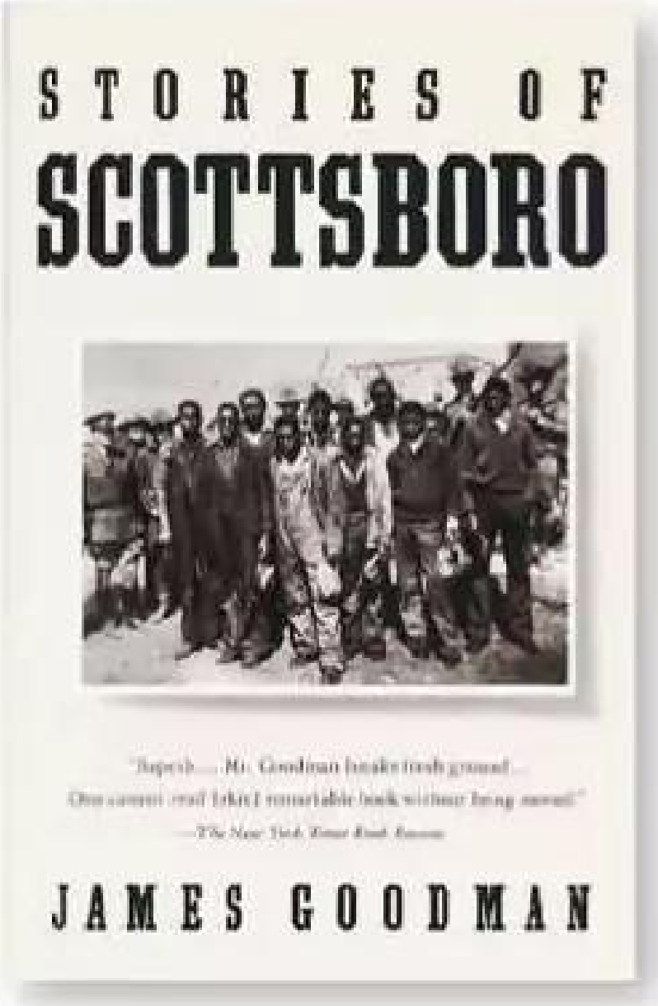
VICTORIA
INTERCONTINE

Soldiers in Bydgoszcz, Poland in 1981. The CIA smuggled books into communist Poland as well as supporting local pro-democracy publishers

GETTY IMAGES

THE CLASSIC BOOK

Adriane Lentz-Smith on a **novel look at a historic episode of racial injustice**



Stories of Scottsboro
by James Goodman
(Pantheon, 1994)

This powerful book opens with the line: “A white foot stepped on a black hand.” It’s a simple sentence describing a simple act but, from there, the story erupts. Arrested after fighting white boys on a train near Scottsboro, Alabama in spring 1931, nine black teenagers were accused of raping two white women also discovered aboard. Within days, eight of the ‘Scottsboro Boys’ had been sentenced to death and were on their way to becoming an international cause celebre. Communists and mainstream civil rights organisations vied to champion them, carrying their cases to the US Supreme Court.

Moving across multiple perspectives, *Stories of Scottsboro* insists that narratives are neither singular nor neutral. Black agrarian radicalism, gender and Jim Crow, the defendants’ lives – all are presented as stories of Scottsboro. Most central is storytelling itself. Historians who cast a romantic haze over the antebellum South and suspicion on the emancipated South secured the ideology that put the tragedy in motion; competing histories challenged that orthodoxy.

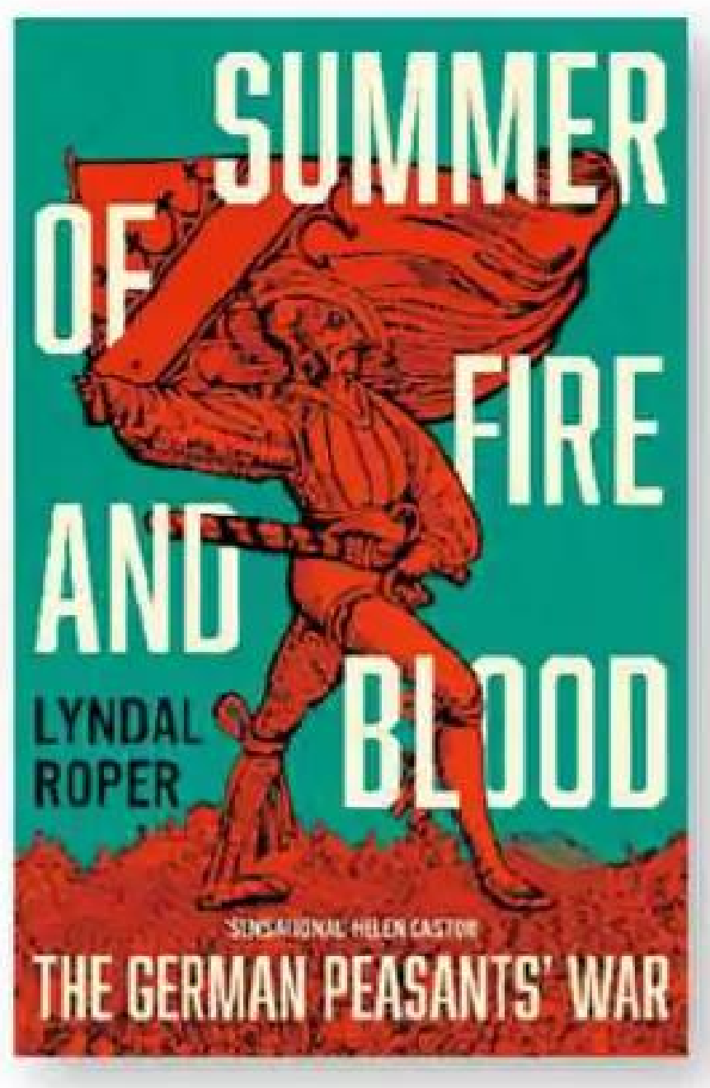
Others have written powerfully on Scottsboro. Goodman’s revelation comes in his emphasis on why people told certain stories of Scottsboro and not others – their divergent attachment to causes and meaning. The book taught me to foreground questions of how and why other people make sense of their experience in the ways that they do. In analysing the complex past and confounding present, this has served me well. H

Adriane Lentz-Smith is associate professor of history at Duke University

EARLY MODERN

The other peasants' revolt

MARK STOYLE is impressed by a new account of a violent uprising that destroyed castles, monasteries and thousands of lives in 16th-century Germany



Summer of Fire and Blood: The German Peasants' War
by Lyndal Roper
Basic Books, 544 pages, £30

In 1524–25, hundreds of thousands of countryfolk rose up in arms across the German lands. Forming large groups – themselves agglomerations of many smaller bands, each representing an individual *Gemeinde*, or village community – the protesters threw off the authority of their lords. They launched a series of attacks upon the monasteries and castles that dominated the local landscape, plundering these imposing buildings and often burning them to the ground. The devastation wrought by the peasant bands was utterly unprecedented: 200 castles were destroyed in a single month in the region of Bamberg alone, and it has been calculated that no fewer than 530 monastic institutions had been attacked by the time the disturbances came to an end.

As Lyndal Roper notes in her fine new study, these popular protests were "far more widespread and wide-ranging… than anything that would be seen in western Europe before the French Revolution". In general, the protests were non-violent, the peasants seeking to dispossess and humiliate those they targeted rather than to do them physical harm. At Weinsberg Castle, however, Count Ludwig von Helfenstein and a group of knights who had been captured by the protesters were slain in cold blood – perhaps in reprisal for von Helfenstein's own killing of a group of peasants a few days before.

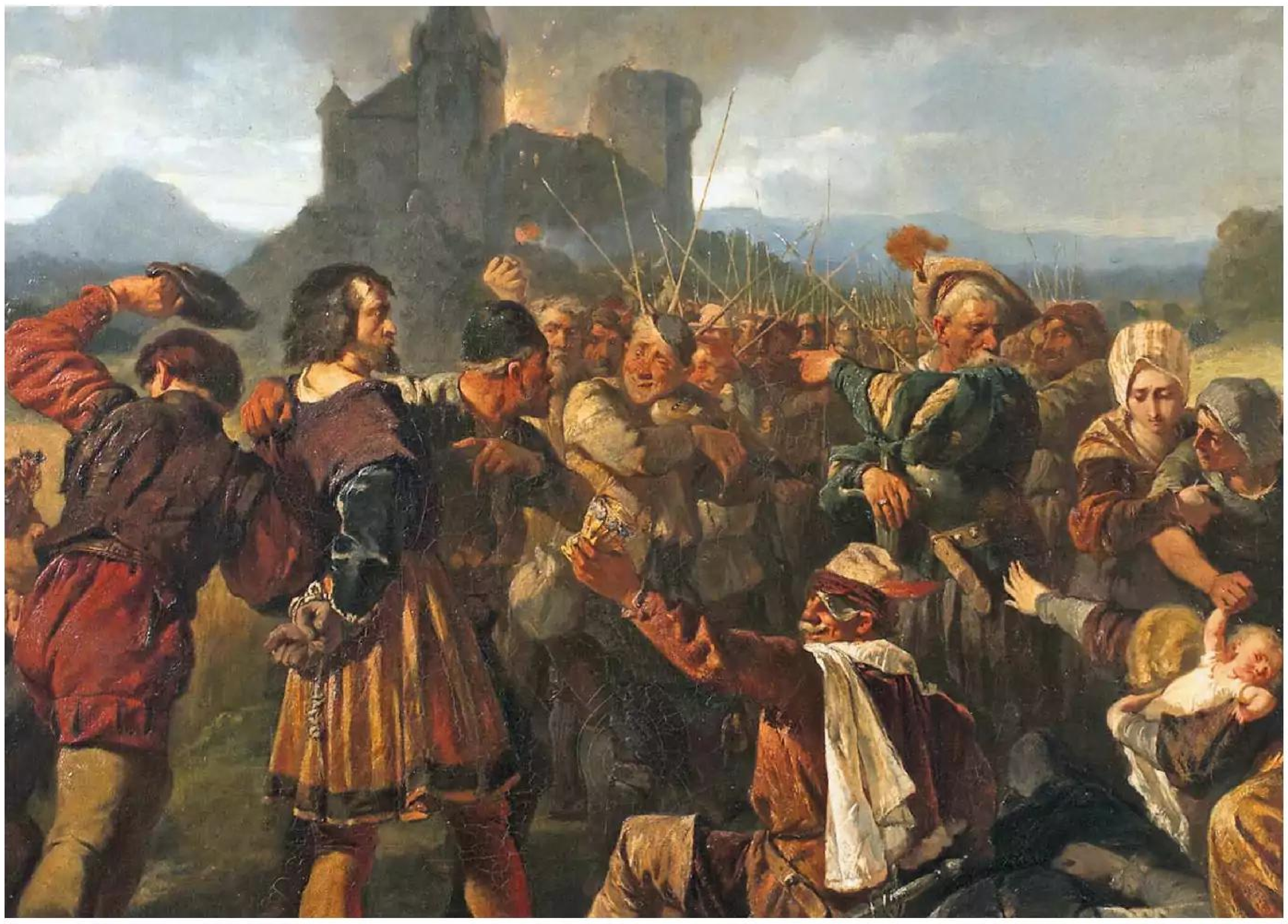
The 'Weinsberg atrocities' doubtless spurred the nobles on; having recovered their nerve and summoned mercenary forces to assist them, they set about crushing the peasants who had dared to challenge their power. Despite the protesters' numbers – and the fact that they were supported, remarkably enough, by a band of cavalry under the command of a sympathetic nobleman named Florian Geyer – they proved no match for the well-trained and well-equipped forces of their opponents. In a series of bloody battles, the rebels were literally cut to pieces by the heavily armed horsemen of the nobles, often suffering thousands of casualties.

Once the rebel bands had been defeated, moreover, the victors took a terrible revenge, slaughtering captured peasants in their droves and executing and mutilating many more. It is thought that some 100,000 died during what contemporaries termed the *Aufruhr*, or turbulence, one eyewitness affirming that "there was hardly a town or castle so small that blood was not shed there".

> **"The rebels were literally cut to pieces by the heavily armed horsemen of the nobles, often suffering thousands of casualties"**

Roper tells the tragic story of the Peasants' War with style and panache, and delves deeply into the causes of the protests. Challenging previous accounts of the rebels' motivation, which have tended to focus on socio-economic issues, she emphasises the spiritual dimension of the rising instead. In particular, she argues that the religious revolution initiated by Martin Luther just a few years earlier had awoken in the German peasantry both a deep hatred for the Catholic church and a desire for 'freedom' in its broadest sense – and that their revolt had been primarily "motivated by religious conviction, a revolutionary religious commitment that our denominational histories have led us to forget". It is a wholly convincing thesis – and all who are interested in popular protest in early modern Europe should read this powerful and important book. H

Mark Stoyle is the author of *A Murderous Midsummer: The Western Rising of 1549* (Yale University Press, 2022)



GETTY IMAGES

Revenge killing A 19th-century painting depicts protesters killing Count Helfenstein at Weinsberg in 1525 during the popular uprising that swept the region

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PHOTO: CLAUDIA GAUPP

ENCOUNTERS

DIARY By **Jonathan Wright** and **Danny Bird**
HISTORY COOKBOOK **Original macaroni cheese**
EXPLORE **Saltaire**, Blackburn

Customers buy copies of *The Star* in an episode of *Jack the Ripper: Written in Blood*. The newspaper's reporting (and alleged fabrication) of aspects of the serial killer case is the focus of this new docudrama

SKY

The
WHITECH

TV

Killer headlines

Did journalists contribute to the serial killer dubbed Jack the Ripper evading justice back in 1888? That's the question at the heart of *Jack the Ripper: Written in Blood*, a three-part docudrama that highlights the work of reporters from Whitechapel newspaper *The Star*. It explores how these proto-tabloid writers, led by the wily TP O'Connor (Moe Dunford), not only passed off speculation as fact but also allegedly planted false leads and forged letters from the killer.

Those offering expert testimony include historians Dr Fern Riddell and Dr Bob Nicholson, investigative journalist Sam Poling, former detective Steven Keogh and medical examiner Dr Peter Dean.

Jack the Ripper: Written in Blood
Sky History & NOW / Streaming now

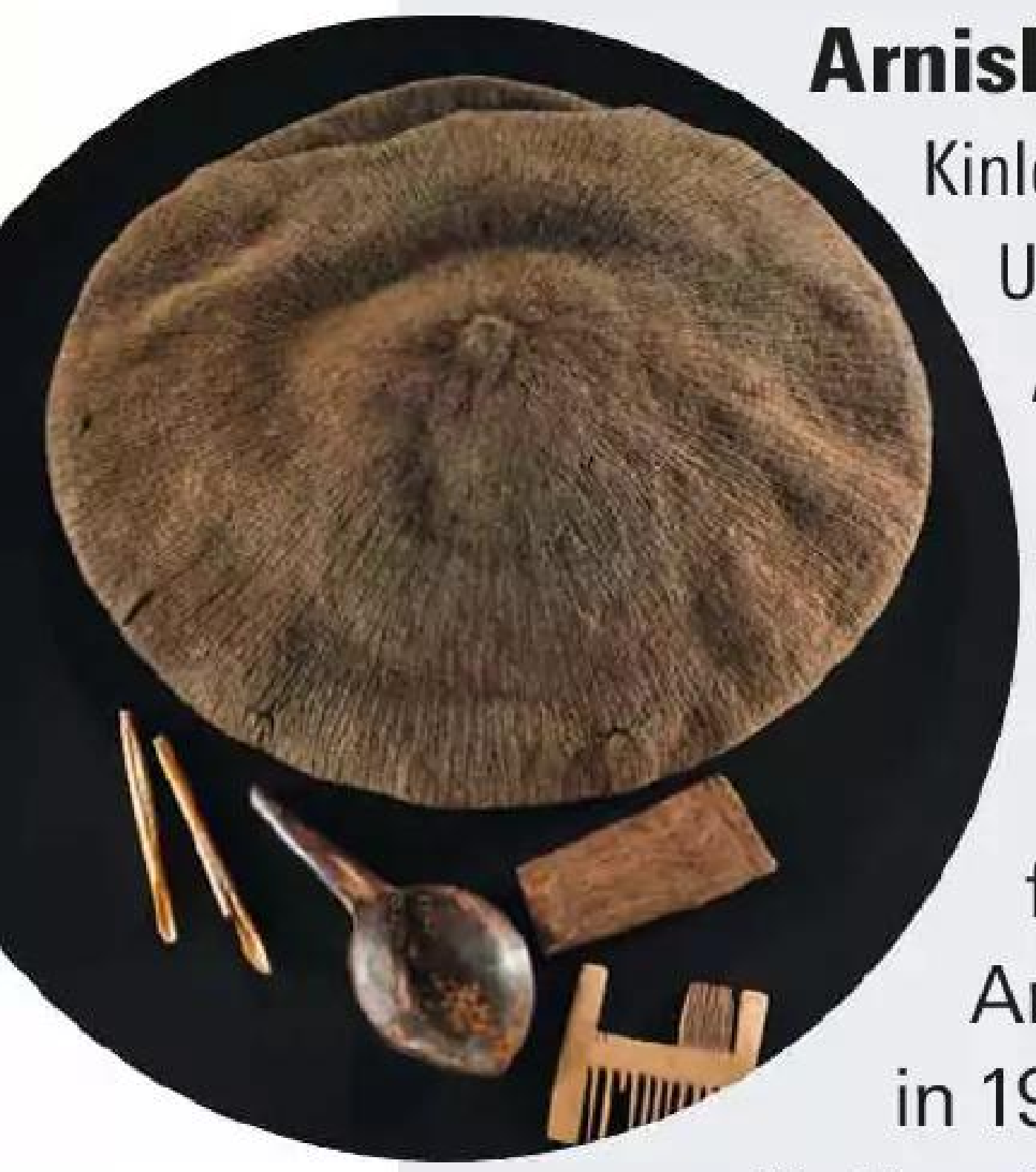
What's on this week?
Visit *historyextra.com* for updates on upcoming history TV and radio programmes

EXHIBITIONS

A Very Respectable Company: Jane Austen and Her Southampton Circle

SeaCity Museum, Southampton / Until October 2025 / *seacitymuseum.co.uk*

Step into Jane Austen's world at this new exhibition displaying rarely seen letters, portraits and personal items belonging to members of her Hampshire circle. The lives of these women, ranging from a mixed-race heiress to a Jamaican plantation owner, echo in novels such as *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, and intertwine with the author's own experiences.



Arnish Moor Man

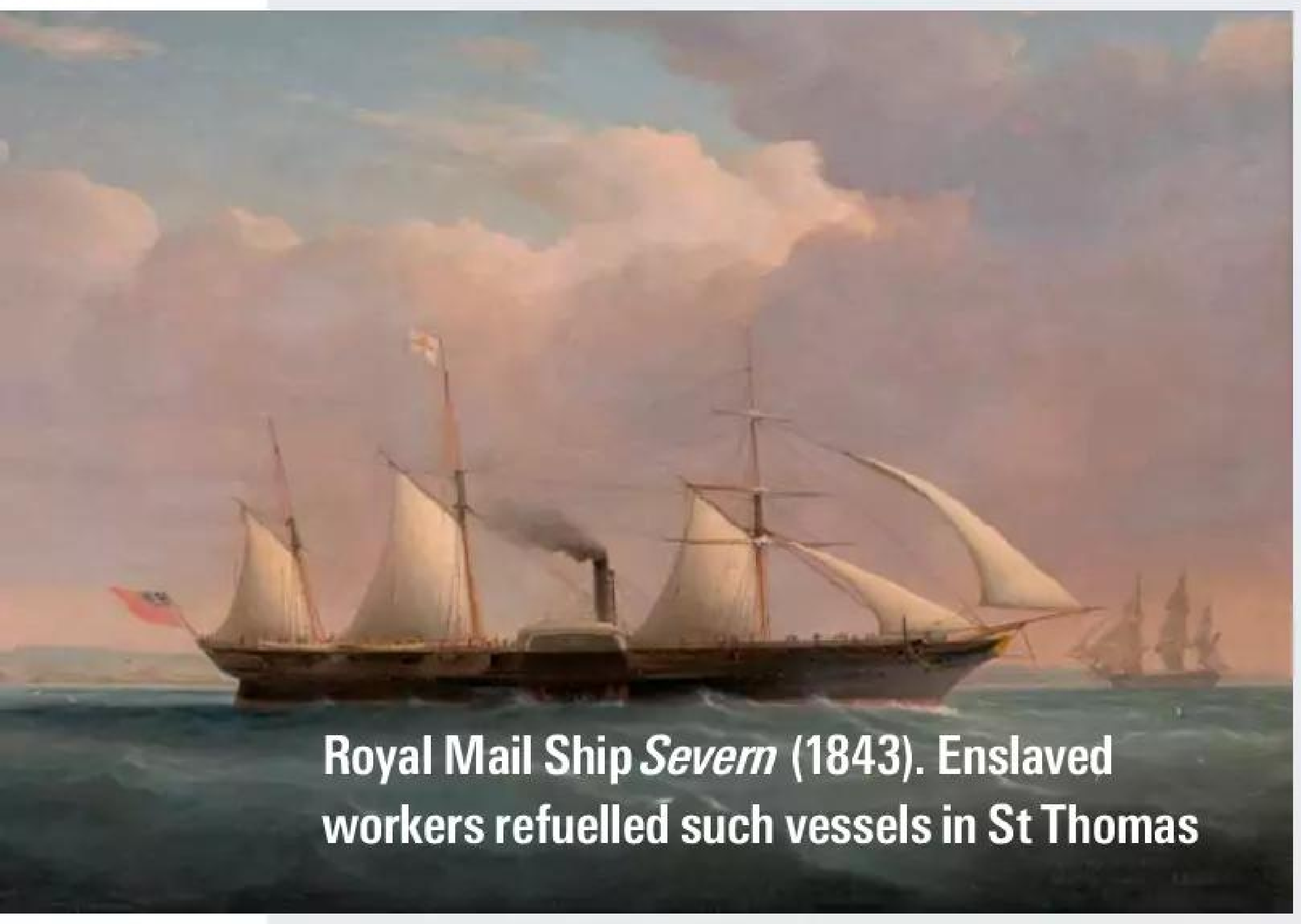
Kinloch Historical Society, Lewis / Until March 2026 / *kinlochhistoricalsociety.co.uk*

This intriguing exhibition explores the case of an unidentified young man whose remains were found in a peat bank on Arnish Moor, Isle of Lewis in 1964. On loan from National Museums Scotland, his remarkably well-preserved indigo-dyed bonnet, quills and wooden comb offer a rare glimpse into 18th-century Hebridean life, and prompt questions about the mystery surrounding his untimely demise.

Voices of Resistance: Slavery and Post in the Caribbean

The Postal Museum, London / Open now / *postalmuseum.org*

Discover the postal service's historical role in transatlantic slavery through the untold stories of enslaved coal workers on the Caribbean island of St Thomas, who toiled to refuel the ships of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company. Featuring postcards, paintings and newly unearthed correspondence between UK-based plantation owners and island managers, this exhibition – shaped by historians and community groups – sheds light on those whose labour powered an empire.



Royal Mail Ship *Severn* (1843). Enslaved workers refuelled such vessels in St Thomas

John Lennon and Yoko Ono, pictured in New York in the 1970s. A new film focuses on their lives in that era

FILM

NYC state of mind

On 30 August 1972, John Lennon performed a benefit show, billed as One to One, at Madison Square Garden. Lennon's last-ever full-length concert, the show forms the focus of *One to One: John & Yoko.* Directed by Kevin Macdonald and Sam Rice-Edwards, and with music audio mastering overseen by Sean Ono Lennon, this film captures the couple at a key moment when they were living modestly in a Greenwich Village apartment.

As well as segments revealing Lennon to be both vibrant and engaged, the film also features footage providing telling context, exploring the social history and paranoia of the Nixon era, when Lennon had to fight being deported from the US because of his criticism of the Vietnam War.

One to One: John & Yoko

In cinemas now

Louis XVI (Louis Cunningham) and his consort (Emilia Schüle) face disquiet in the new series of *Marie Antoinette*

TV

Troubled reign

Marie Antoinette, the lavish drama about the ill-fated French queen consort, starring Emilia Schüle, is back for a second series. As we return to 18th-century France, things aren't going so well for Louis XVI (Louis Cunningham), a monarch trying to keep the dire state of the nation's finances from all and sundry. Meantime, rumours of tax rises cause alarm among the clergy and the nobility, while extreme weather – associated in the historical record with volcanic activity in Iceland – makes life difficult for the less-privileged people of France.

As for Marie herself, she continues to be a target for those unhappy with her husband's rule – as becomes clear during the so-called 'Affair of the Diamond Necklace'.

Marie Antoinette

BBC Two / From Thursday 8 May

KINLOCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY/THE POSTAL MUSEUM/BBC/GETTY IMAGES

Watch celebrities from a range of backgrounds and faiths tackle an Alpine pilgrimage trail

TV

Higher purpose

Tramping nearly 200 miles in search of spiritual enlightenment, seven celebrities have been tackling a revived medieval pilgrimage trail through the Alps. Their journey on the Austrian Camino begins outside Innsbruck and finishes south of Lake Zurich in Switzerland.

As ever in the *Pilgrimage* strand, the different participants have different spiritual perspectives. Comedian Helen Lederer, for instance, is from a mixed-faith background, with a culturally Jewish father and a Protestant mother, while Jay McGuiness – singer in The Wanted – is an agnostic, and journalist Nelufar Hedayat refers to herself as a modern Muslim. All the hikers share and discuss their beliefs as they walk.

Pilgrimage: The Road Through the Alps
BBC Two / From Sunday 20 April

Comedian Aisling Bea is among the celebrities exploring their family history on the BBC's long-running genealogy show

BBC

TV

Family secrets

The longevity of *Who Do You Think You Are?,* now on its 22nd series, is a testament to our enduring fascination with finding personal connections to the past. New episodes include a turn from Hollywood A-lister Andrew Garfield, who found fame first in *The Social Network* and later as Spider-Man. His research uncovers stories of the Holocaust, the Jewish diaspora and the glamour of early Hollywood.

Also featured in the series are comedians Aisling Bea and Diane Morgan, singer Will Young, maître d' and date-night facilitator Fred Sirieix, Ross Kemp (of *EastEnders* fame), journalist Mishal Husain, and actor and musical theatre star Layton Williams.

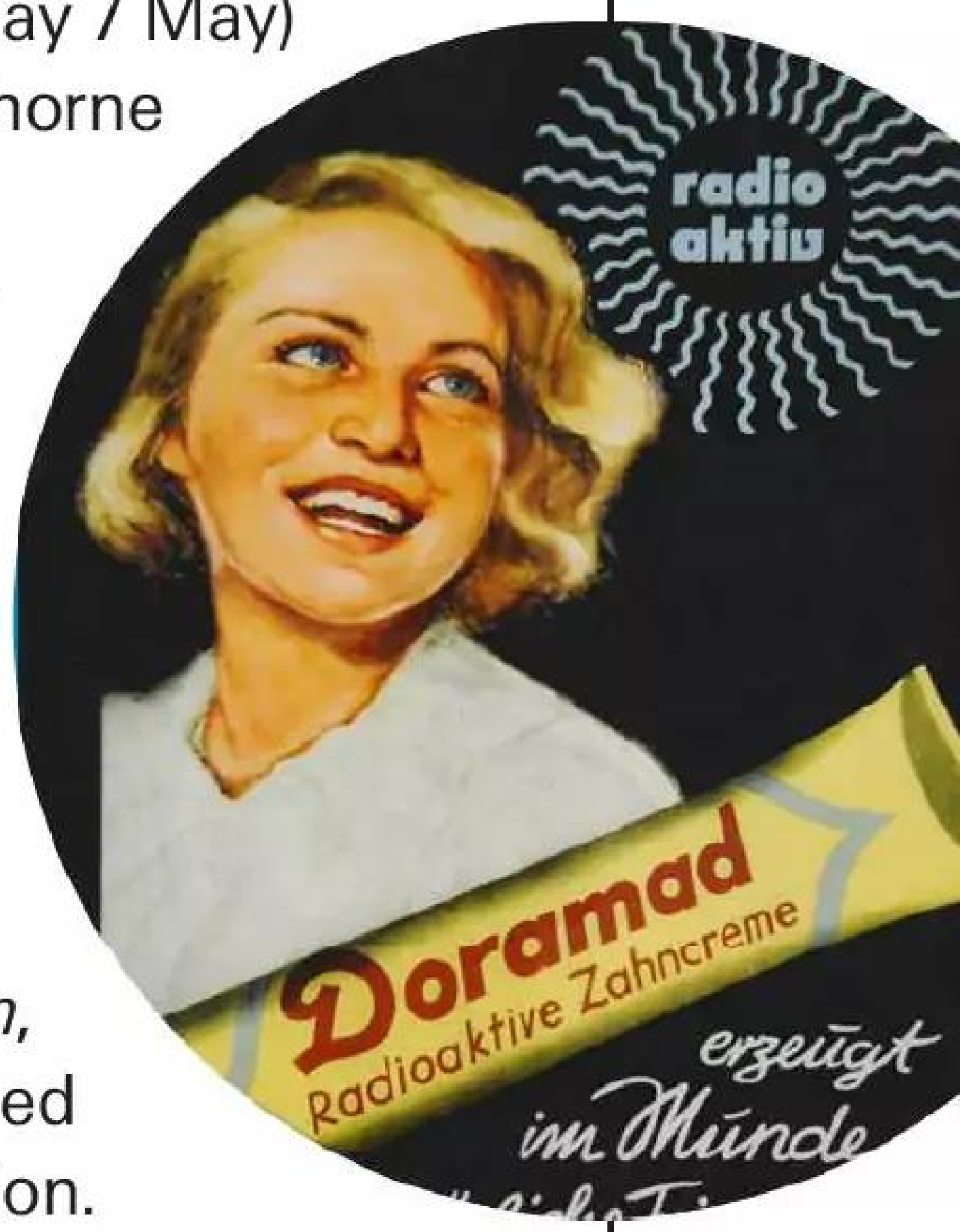
Who Do You Think You Are?
BBC One / From Tuesday 22 April

RADIO HIGHLIGHTS

Explosive details

On the night of 29–30 December 1940, the Luftwaffe dropped around 100,000 bombs on London. One area hit badly was Paternoster Row, a locale associated with the publishing industry, where as many as 5 million books were destroyed. **The Essay: Books for Brighter Blackouts** (BBC Radio 3, Monday 5–Friday 9 May), presented by Professor Emma Smith as part of programming to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day, considers how the war impacted books and publishing.

Eight-parter **Half-Life** (BBC Radio 4, Wednesday 7 May) follows writer Joe Dunthorne as he researches his great-grandfather Siegfried, a German-Jewish chemist who made radioactive toothpaste in the 1920s (pictured). Covering some of the same ground as Dunthorne's acclaimed book *Children of Radium*, it details how he stumbled on a disturbing confession.



Among forthcoming episodes of *Archive On 4*, **The United States vs Ramona Africa** (Saturday 10 May) marks the 40th anniversary of the MOVE massacre in which a helicopter operated by the Philadelphia Police Department dropped two explosive devices on a commune, killing 11 people – including five children. Ramona Africa, whose testimony features in the programme, is the sole survivor.

Also on Radio 4, **Illuminated: A Map of the Moon** (Sunday 11 May) looks at how people have projected their imaginations onto our satellite.

On BBC World Service, two *Heart and Soul* documentaries look especially fascinating. **Trauma, Tranquillity and TikTok** (Friday 18 April) reveals how Buddhist monks have helped Cambodians emerge from the country's troubled past. And **Malcolm X: Letter from Hajj** (Friday 16 May) explores how the activist's 1964 pilgrimage to Mecca reshaped his worldview. Also on BBC World Service, highlights in the *Witness History* strand include publisher Pere Vicens recalling the launch of World Book Day in 1995 (Friday 18 April).

Finally, in **Gangster Presents: Hooligans** (BBC Sounds, available now), Tony Bellew tells the story of the 'English disease', football hooliganism. H

Benjamin Voisin stars as Antonin Carême in a new television series about the pioneering French chef

TV

Secret ingredients

Arguably the world's first celebrity chef, Antonin Carême (c1784–1833) rose from humble beginnings to cook for not only the leaders of French society but also European royals such as Tsar Alexander I and the British Prince Regent. Along the way, he became famed for his elaborate *pièces montées* – sugar-sculpted table decorations depicting classical buildings.

Based on a book by Ian Kelly, the French-language drama *Carême* traces the chef's rise during the Napoleonic era, telling a dramatic tale encompassing gastronomy, spying and political machinations.

César Award-winner Benjamin Voisin stars in the title role, while the series is directed by Martin Bourboulon (*Les Trois Mousquetaires: D'Artagnan*). H

Carême
Apple TV+ / Streaming from Wednesday 30 April

GAMES / Atomic explorer

JAMES OSBORNE navigates the perils of Cold War Britain in an alternative history imagining a catastrophic outcome to the Windscale nuclear disaster

Atomfall
Rebellion Developments / £54.99

The Windscale disaster of 1957 was the most significant nuclear incident in British history. When a pile (reactor) at the nuclear facility in Cumbria caught fire, the resulting blaze lasted for three days and spread contaminating radioactive fallout across the UK and beyond to parts of Europe.

Fearing potential damage to its reputation – and to its relationship with the US – the British government downplayed the severity of the incident, and censored information released to the public about the fire and its consequences. Later studies highlighted negative long-term health outcomes that can be traced back to the fire. But what if the disaster had been even worse?

Set in 1960s Britain, *Atomfall* answers that question by imagining an alternative history, conjuring a world in which the Windscale fire had much graver ramifications. Players step into a quarantined stretch of the Lake District occupied by an isolated society that is shaped by secrecy and fearful of the unknown effects of the radiation leak.

In the game, you take on the role of an amnesiac protagonist, cautiously navigating this exclusion zone. The subsequent narrative of the game is shaped by interactions with various factions including government forces maintaining control, isolated survivors and esoteric cults that have formed in response to the crisis. Rooted in the tradition of the survival genre, gameplay demands that you scavenge for resources while contending with frequent – and intimidating – environmental and human threats to life, and leans heavily into the cultural anxiety and atmosphere of Cold War Britain.

These aspects all combine to make *Atomfall* a compellingly niche alternative history that successfully latches onto the paranoia of the era, and an exciting – albeit anxiety-inducing – experience. H

James Osborne is digital content editor for *HistoryExtra*

Atomfall thrusts players into a quarantined region of an alternative 1960s Britain in which the Windscale nuclear accident had calamitous impacts

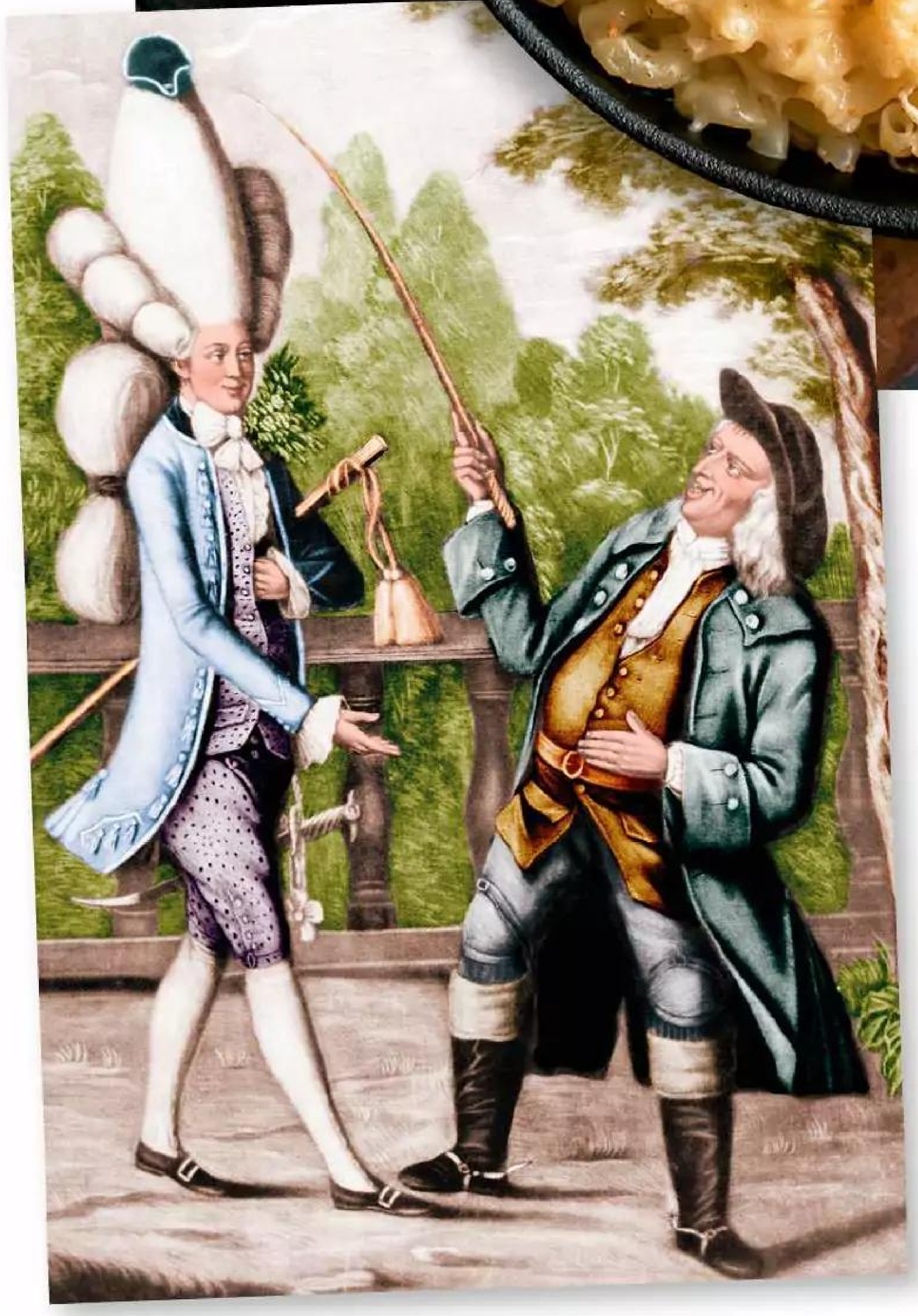
GAMES PRESS/APPLE TV

RECIPE

The original macaroni cheese

ELEANOR BARNETT cooks a comfort dish that has become a modern staple but which was first recorded in the 18th century

The first reference to modern macaroni cheese is found in Elizabeth Raffald's 1769 book *The Experienced English Housekeeper*



In the 18th century, the word 'macaroni' was also used to refer to a man with elaborate clothes and wig

Mac 'n' cheese is an American classic. It's the ultimate comfort food: cheesy, gooey, warming. One persistent myth maintains that Thomas Jefferson brought James Hemings, an enslaved man, to France to train as a chef; he then brought back a pasta machine and a recipe for macaroni and cheese to serve to the American elite.

In fact, it wasn't until the Great Depression of the 1930s that macaroni cheese became widespread in American culture. Canadian-American businessman James Lewis Kraft had pioneered the production of processed cheese during the First World War. Then Grant Leslie, a salesman from St Louis, Missouri, combined dried processed cheese with industrially dried pasta. And in 1937, Kraft introduced the Kraft Dinner – a mass-produced macaroni and cheese mix sold at a very low price that fed millions when food was hard to come by.

Yet macaroni cheese can be traced back even further – to 18th-century Britain. In the earlier part of that period, 'macaroni' was a term used more often to refer to an elaborately dressed man who had assimilated Italian fashion and food while on his Grand Tour. This trip across the continent was a mainstay of British aristocratic education in the 18th century.

Italians had indeed been pairing pasta with cheese since at least the Middle Ages, when 'macaroni' was used to refer to a whole host of different types of pasta. However, we probably wouldn't recognise any of these early Italian recipes as macaroni and cheese.

The first reference to modern macaroni cheese comes from Elizabeth Raffald's *The Experienced English Housekeeper* (1769), and it is this recipe that I have recreated here.

Raffald describes a simple dish made by tossing cooked macaroni in a basic early version of béchamel sauce made with butter, flour and cream, and covering it in parmesan cheese. This makes what would later be known in French cookery as a Mornay sauce. It's incredibly easy to make, and certainly matches modern-day versions – no need to reach for packaged shortcuts.

Interestingly, Raffald ends her recipe by writing: "Send to the table on a water plate, for it soon goes cold." This was a double plate with a space in the middle in which hot water was poured to keep the food warm. As we know, macaroni cheese is certainly a dish best served hot and melty. H

Serves: 2
Difficulty: 1/10
Time taken: 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS

115g dried macaroni
145ml double cream
40g butter (softened)
15g flour
40g parmesan cheese

METHOD

1. Boil the macaroni per packet instructions, then drain it and add to a frying pan.
2. Roll the softened butter into a ball and cover in flour.
3. Add the double cream and butter/flour ball to the frying pan and cook on a low heat for about five minutes.
4. Transfer to a bowl, then mix in a handful of parmesan cheese.
5. Toast under the grill for two to three minutes until melty and slightly browned.

Eleanor Barnett is a food historian at Cardiff University and @Historyeats on Instagram. Her book *Leftovers: A History of Food Waste and Preservation* (Apollo) is out now

DREAMSTIME.COM/MARY EVANS

A model of innovation

A workers' village boasting light-filled houses and green parks set a new standard for urban planning in the 19th century. **CONNIE ROUT** takes a tour of Sir Titus Salt's trailblazing industrial-age project

What springs to mind when you picture a Victorian mill town? Probably not the green parks, neoclassical architecture and Turkish bath of Saltaire – the model village built by Sir Titus Salt for his workers in the mid-19th century.

Today, Saltaire – just outside Bradford, the 2025 UK City of Culture – is characterised by its charming terraced houses and quirky independent shops. Thanks to information boards dotted around the streets and a free heritage trail, anyone can explore the story of this trailblazing industrial-age project.

In 1851, when building commenced at Saltaire, Bradford's population had ballooned to more than 103,000. It was the UK's fastest-growing city, and its crowded, unsanitary streets told a particularly Dickensian tale.

Seeing these problems, Titus Salt – a self-made Bradford industrialist – had a novel idea. He wanted to move his textile production from the stinking city to the surrounding countryside, and bring his workers with it. The result was Saltaire, built across from Salts Mill. It's one of the finest examples of philanthropic paternalism in the world.

Recognising the importance of a healthy workforce (and, as a fervent Congregationalist, a clean moral conscience), Salt envisaged a village in which families could live comfortably, and hired the architecture firm Lockwood and Mawson to build it. Once completed, Saltaire was noted for its innovative approach to town planning, and set the benchmark for other model villages such as George Cadbury's Bournville in Birmingham.

The architects, steered by Salt's vision, could never have guessed that their creation would still be celebrated 150 years later. In 2001, Saltaire was named a Unesco World Heritage Site for its contribution to industrial social welfare and urban planning.

Exploring the orderly streets and cobbled terraces today, there are a few hints at the perks of 19th-century life in Saltaire. The abundance of public amenities is one: there was a school, a hospital, public greens and an 'institute' containing a gymnasium and lecture hall, among other facilities.

Then there are the considerate extras you have to know about to appreciate. For example, Lockwood and Mawson designed the streets to be just the right width and the houses just the right height to ensure that plenty of light flooded into every home. Salts Mill itself was purposefully built downwind of the houses to avoid harmful smoke pollution wafting into the village.

Even more astounding for the time, each house had running water, gas lights and a toilet (albeit outside), no matter the status of its tenants. Almshouses overlooking a public green provided elderly and infirm individuals with a place to live free of rent; they also received a weekly pension, 41 years before the first state pension was issued.

On a sunny day, modern visitors can enjoy a picnic by the river Aire in Roberts Park, or a stroll down the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. You can also step off the village heritage trail and into the mill itself. Here, the heat and noise of wool production have long died away, but the People and Process exhibition makes sure the story of Saltaire lives on in its fascinating museum collection.

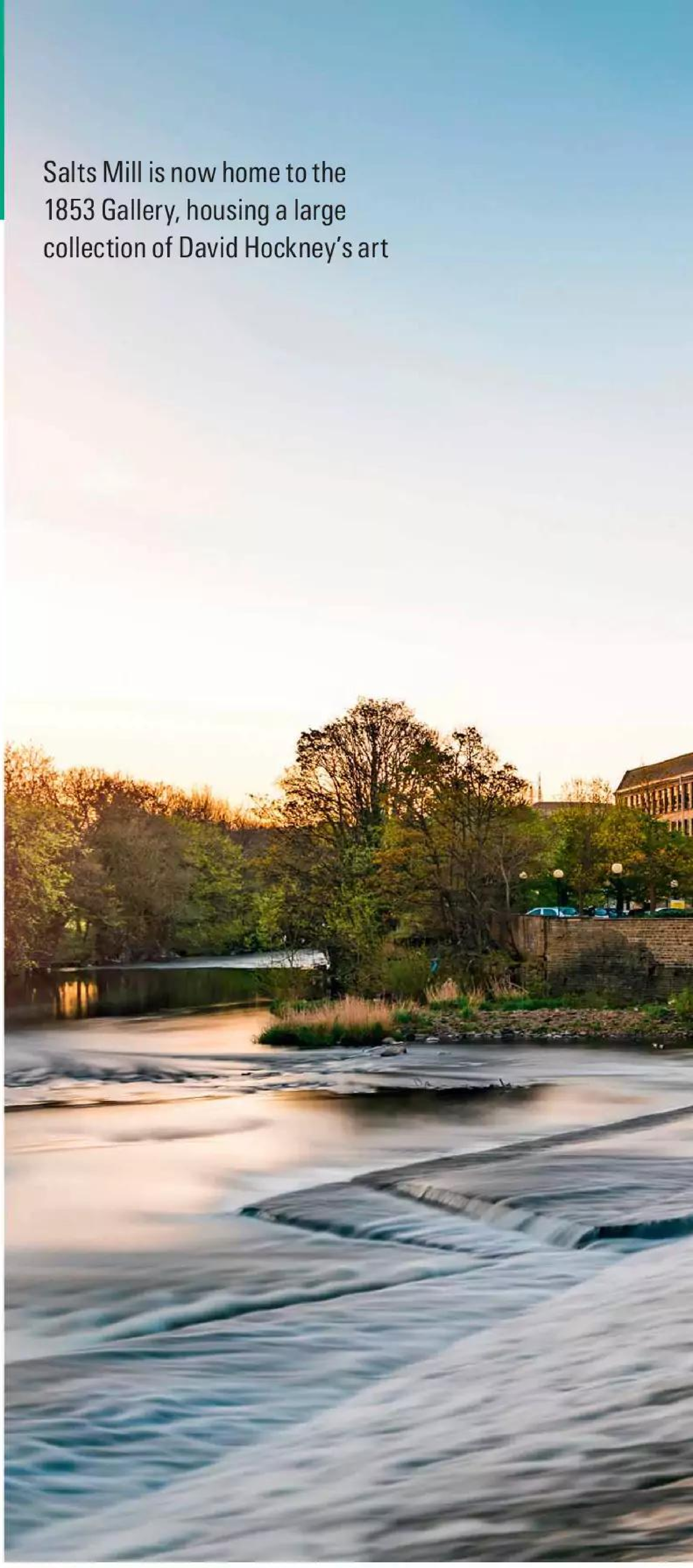
Elsewhere in the mill, art enthusiasts will appreciate a permanent display of work by Bradford-born David Hockney, alongside thriving independent shops and the UK's only Peace Museum. Clearly, the merging of creativity, industry and social advocacy continues to characterise Bradford's one-of-a-kind model village. H

> **"The village of Saltaire is one of the finest examples of philanthropic paternalism in the world"**

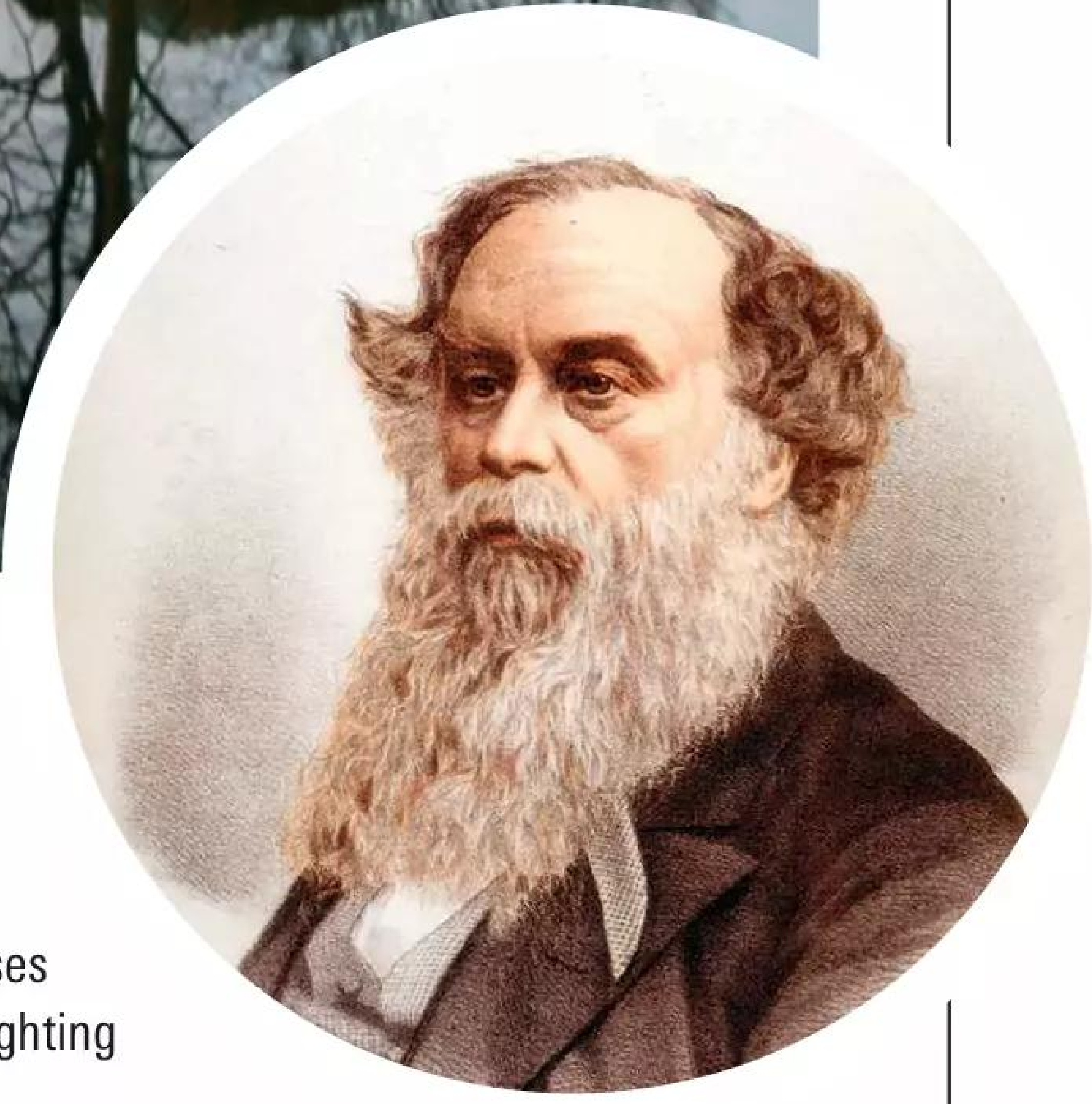
Connie Rout is a freelance writer specialising in heritage and tourism. She also runs a lighthearted blog, *historicalallsorts.wordpress.com*

For more information, head to **visitbradford.com**

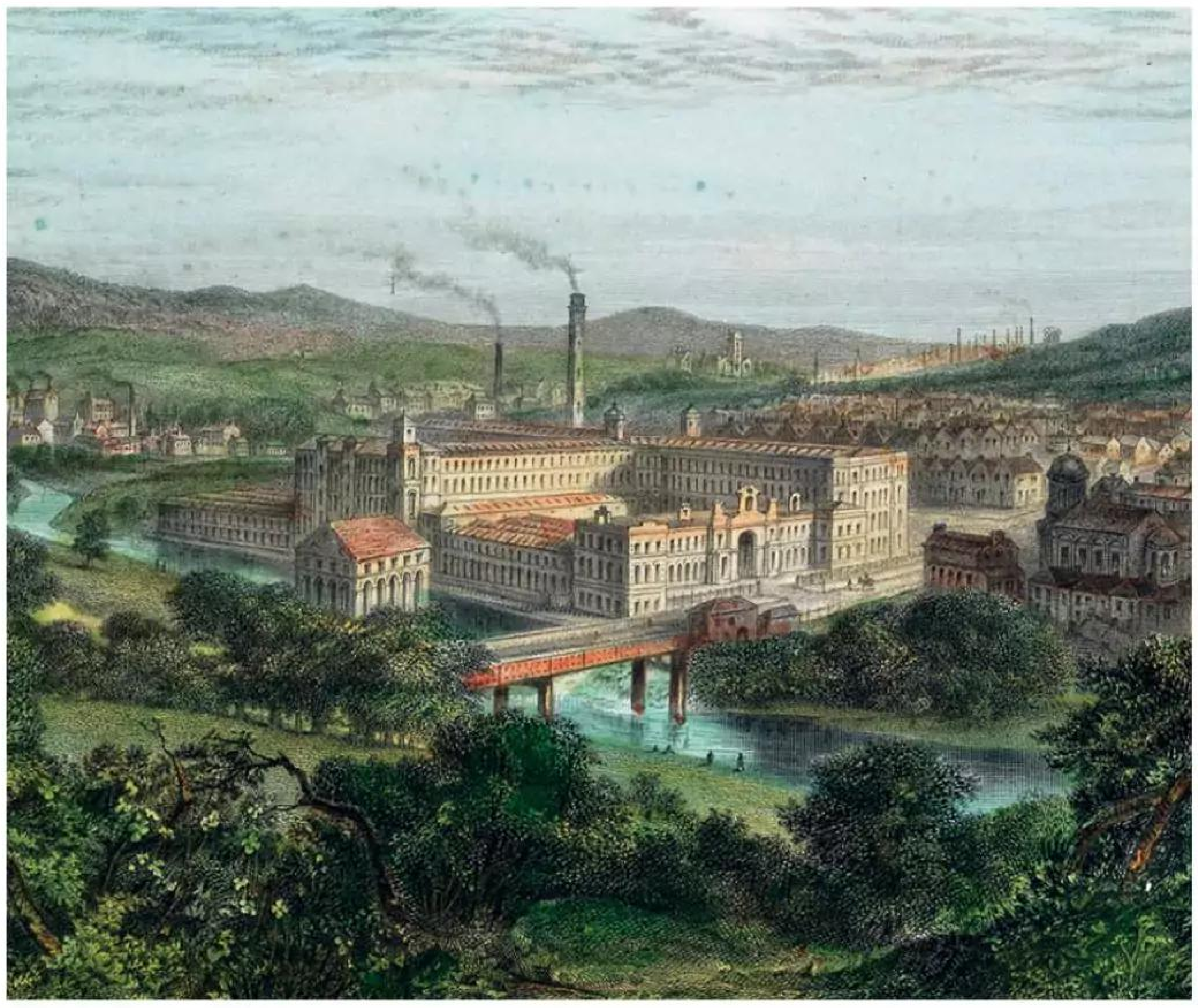
Salts Mill is now home to the 1853 Gallery, housing a large collection of David Hockney's art



Titus Salt was a devout Christian, so it was important to him that the Saltaire United Reformed Church was at the heart of the village



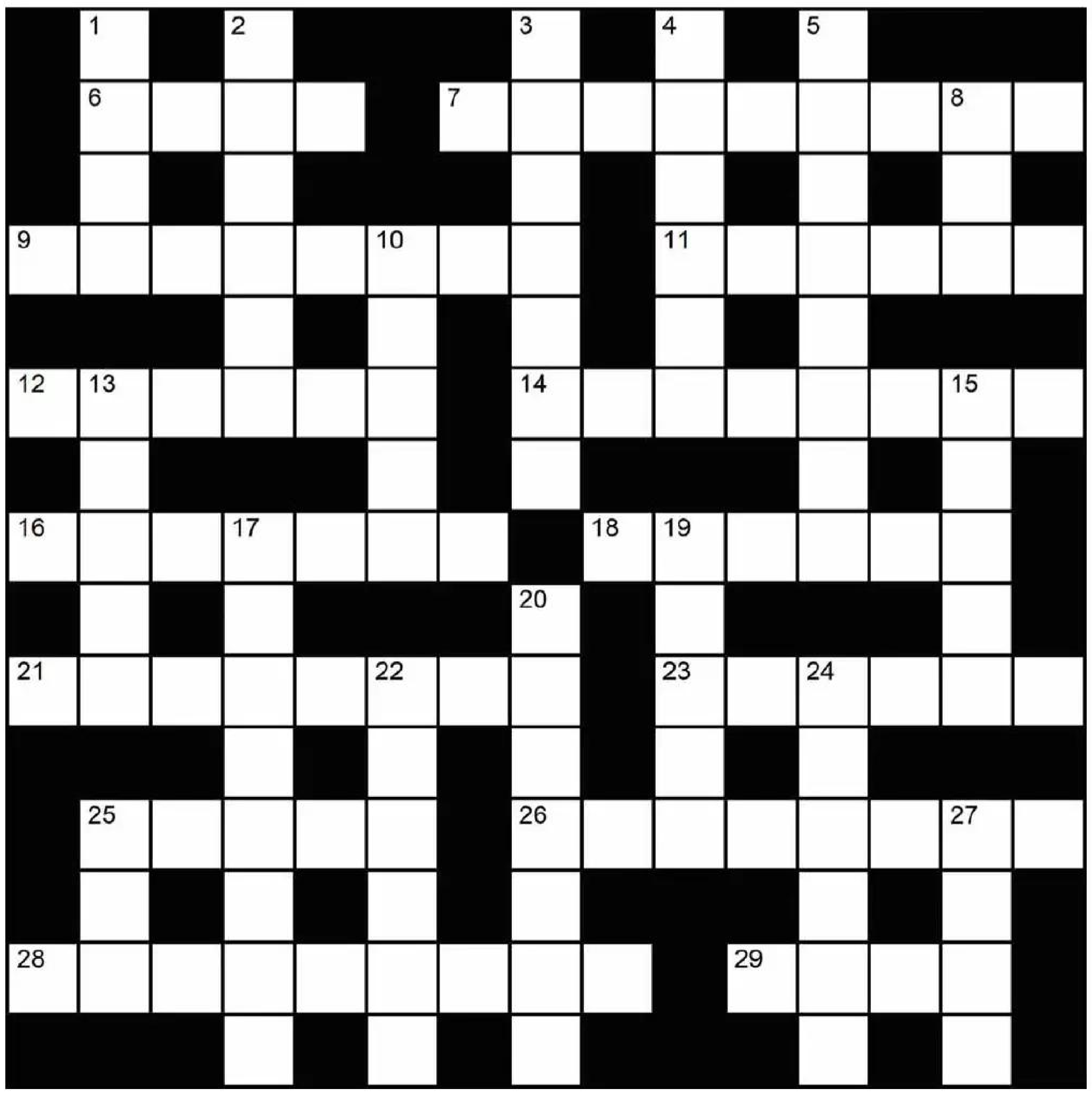
RIGHT: British industrialist Sir Titus Salt (1803–76) made his fortune from alpaca wool and built Salts Mill
BELOW: All of the millworkers' houses in Saltaire had running water, gas lighting and an outside toilet



Founded in 1851, Saltaire and its textile mill were located on the Leeds and Liverpool canal, which was a useful transport link

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES/DREAMSTIME

PRIZE CROSSWORD



Across

6 Papal edict, name derived from the lead seal traditionally affixed to such a document (4)

7 14th-century BC queen of Egypt, chief wife of Akhenaten (9)

9 Soviet leader whose 18-year tenure encompassed an era of economic and social stagnation (8)

11 Unit of weight used by ancient Hebrews, Greeks and Romans (6)

12 Edward ____, British pioneer of the science of immunology, who developed a smallpox vaccine (6)

14 This city became the capital of the Confederate States of America early in the American Civil War (8)

16 Third-century Christian martyr after whom a Hertfordshire town is named (2,5)

18 Karl ____, naval commander who, for a few days in 1945, succeeded Hitler as German head of state (6)

21 Either of two major Palestinian uprisings against Israeli occupation, the first dating from 1987 (8)

23 A term often applied to pre-1947 British rule in India (3,3)

25 Japanese warrior-spy, alternatively called a Shinobi (5)

26 A traditional tin-mining area of Cornwall or Devon (8)

28 Main site of England's government offices since Henry VIII established his palace there in 1530 (9)

29 Léon ____, who in 1936 became the first socialist prime minister of France (4)

Down

1 Abbreviated name for the Roman garrison that later became the city of York (4)

2 Heraldic term for a coat of arms description, among other things (6)

3 Raiders who operated along the Anglo-Scottish border in the 13th–17th centuries (7)

4 Group of six languages including Manx and Breton (6)

5 Alexander the Great's Macedonian general who became ruler of Egypt and founded a dynasty named after him (7,1)

8 Imperial unit of weight derived from the term for a large cask (3)

10 Emperor of Rome for less than two years, succeeded by Trajan (5)

13 Fanny ____, born in Jamaica, best known as a popular model for the Pre-Raphaelites and their circle (5)

15 A Peruvian culture known for its extensive designs ('Lines') in the desert (5)

17 Town in the Austrian state of Styria, close to the Roman municipium of Flavia Solva founded in the first century AD (8)

19 Port and naval base of ancient Rome, until its harbour silted up (5)

20 John ____, a clerk in the British embassy in Moscow, coerced to spy for the Soviets in the 1950s (7)

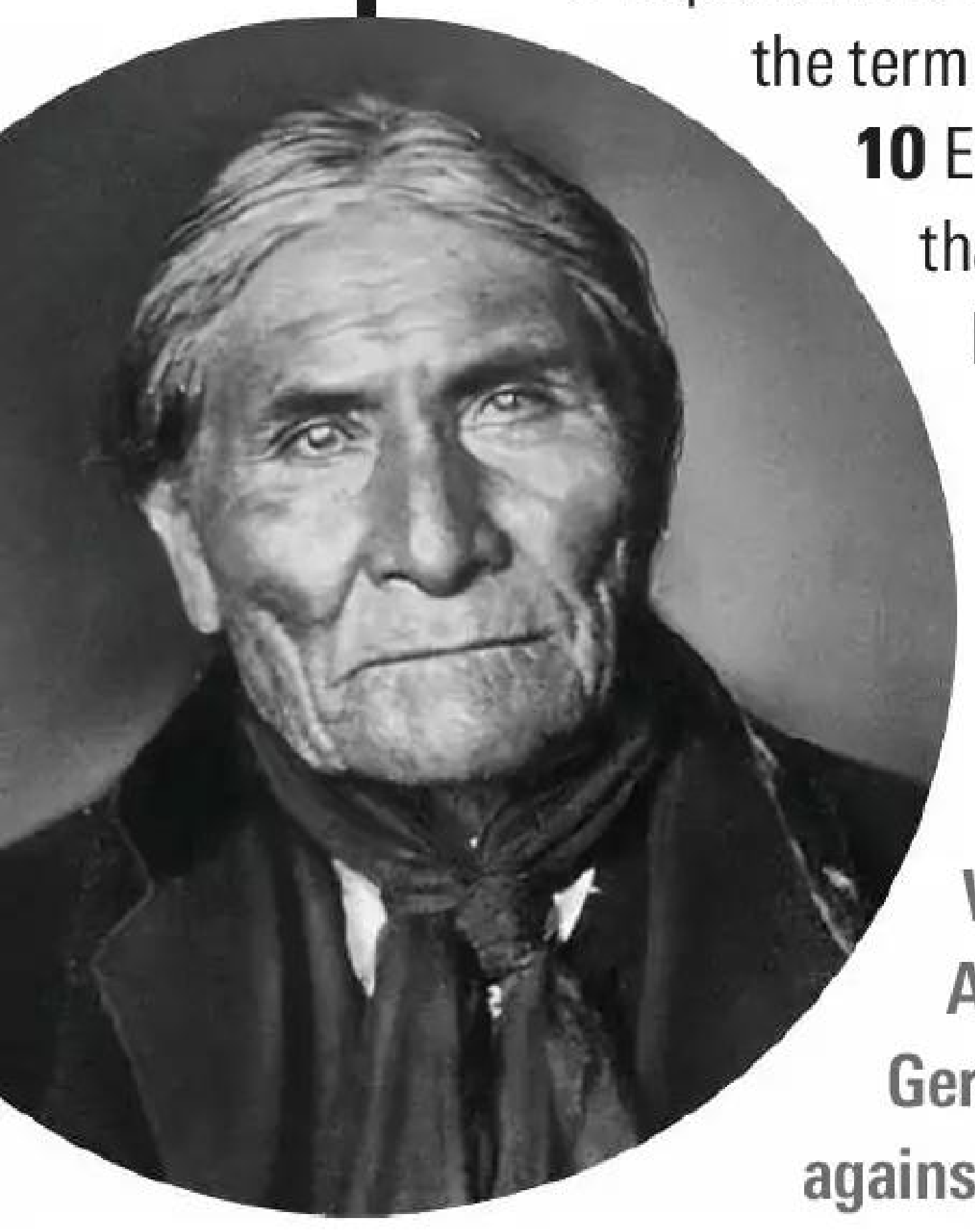
22 Geronimo's surrender in 1886 effectively ended the wars between this group of peoples and the US army (6)

24 Martin ____, British human rights activist and former Amnesty International leader (6)

25 Traditional Japanese theatrical form, one of the world's oldest still being performed (3)

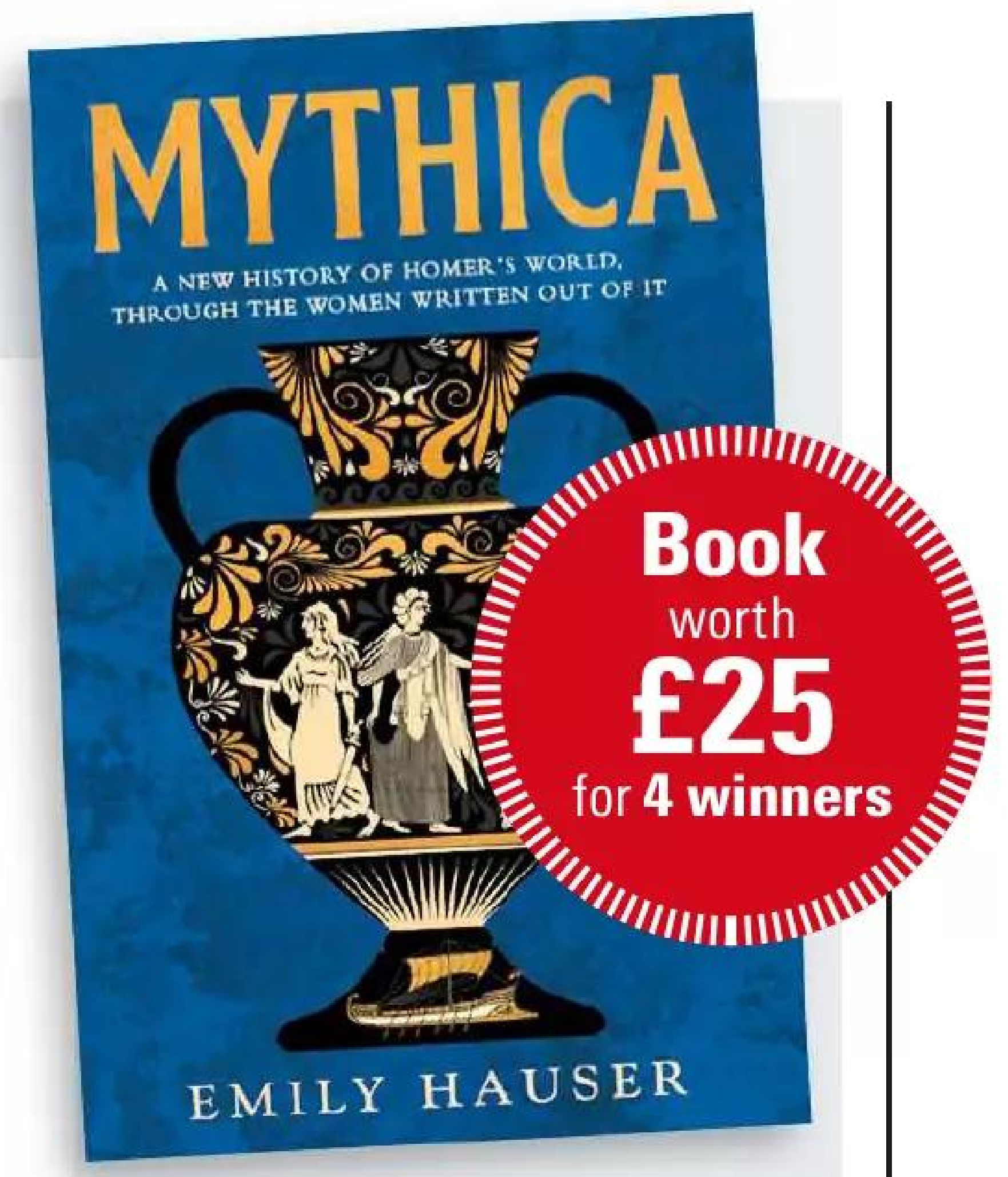
27 A phase of England's Long Parliament after it was purged in 1648 (4)

Compiled by **Eddie James**



Which group of Native American peoples did Geronimo lead in wars against the US army? *(22 down)*

What was the abbreviated name of the Roman garrison at this English city? *(1 down)*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Solution to our March 2025 crossword

Across 1 Lovell 4 Amphora 9 Caratacus 11 Golda 12 Canon 13 Trevelyan 14 Pitcher 16 Dolmen 20 Anning 21 Shastri 24 Justinian 26 Boone 27 Nkomo 28 Iron Cross 29 Denmark 30 Angola

Down 1 Lacock 2 Varangian 3 Latin 5 Musket 6 Huguenots 7 Rally 8 Canning 10 Cutter 15 Cuneiform 17 Marco Polo 18 Nanjing 19 Shinto 22 Vizier 23 Persia 25 Scone 26 Bacon

Four winners of *London Uncanny*:

David Jellings, Bristol; R Thwaite, Altrincham; Rod McDonald, Peterborough; Brian Cooper, Watford

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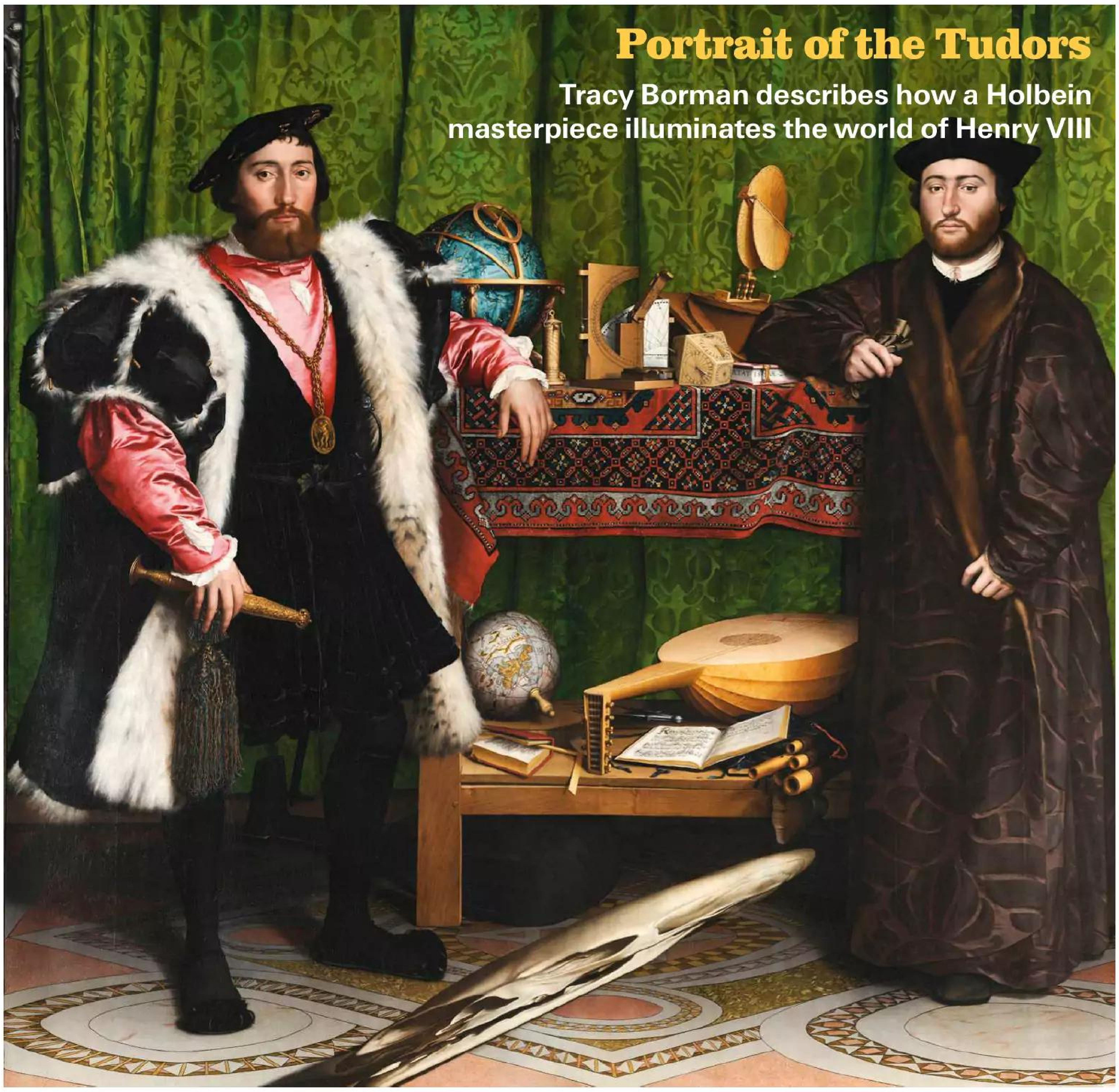
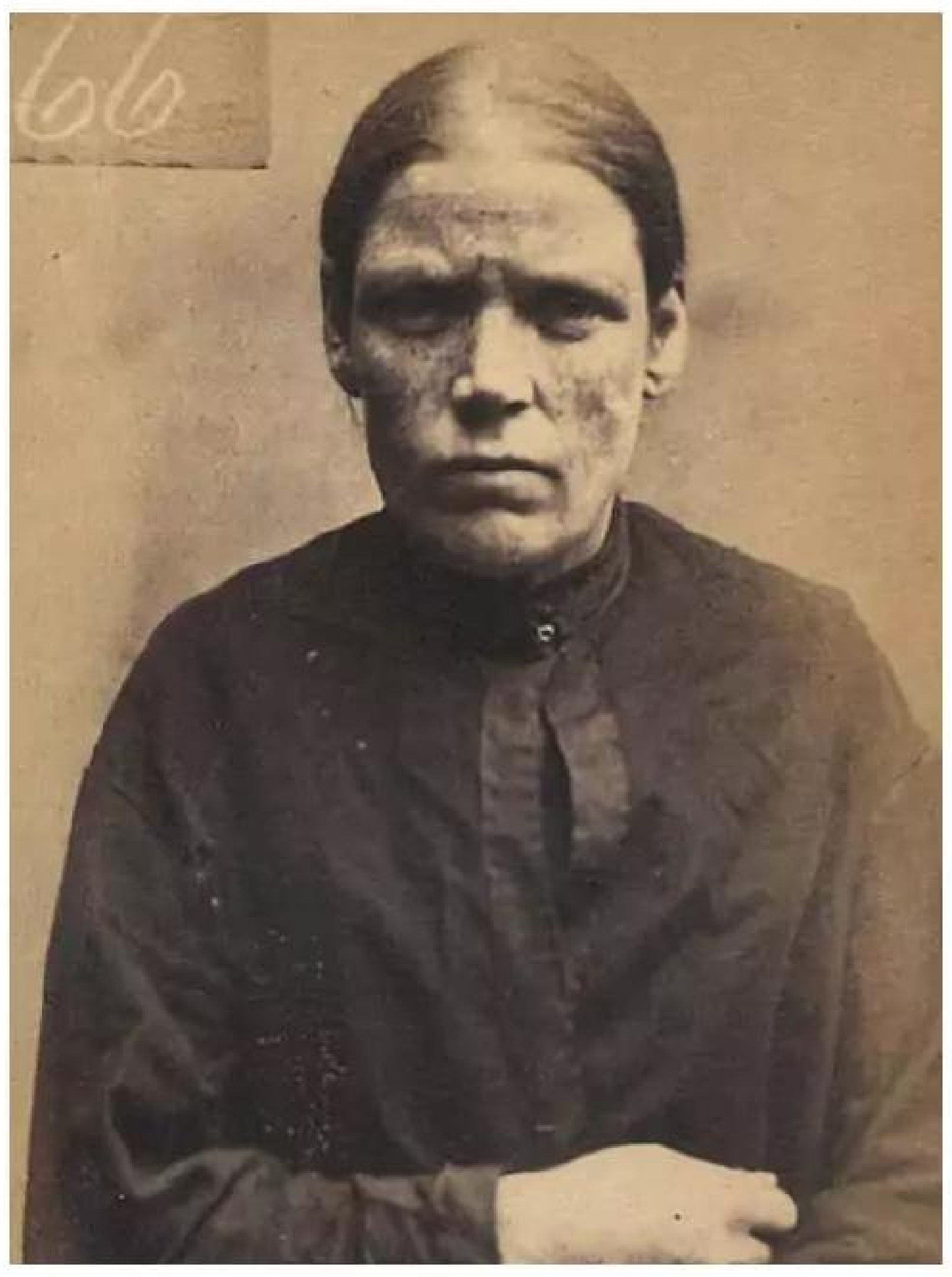


Portrait of the Tudors

Tracy Borman describes how a Holbein masterpiece illuminates the world of Henry VIII

The making of a radical

Ashley D Farmer explores the story of Malcolm X through the women who shaped his life

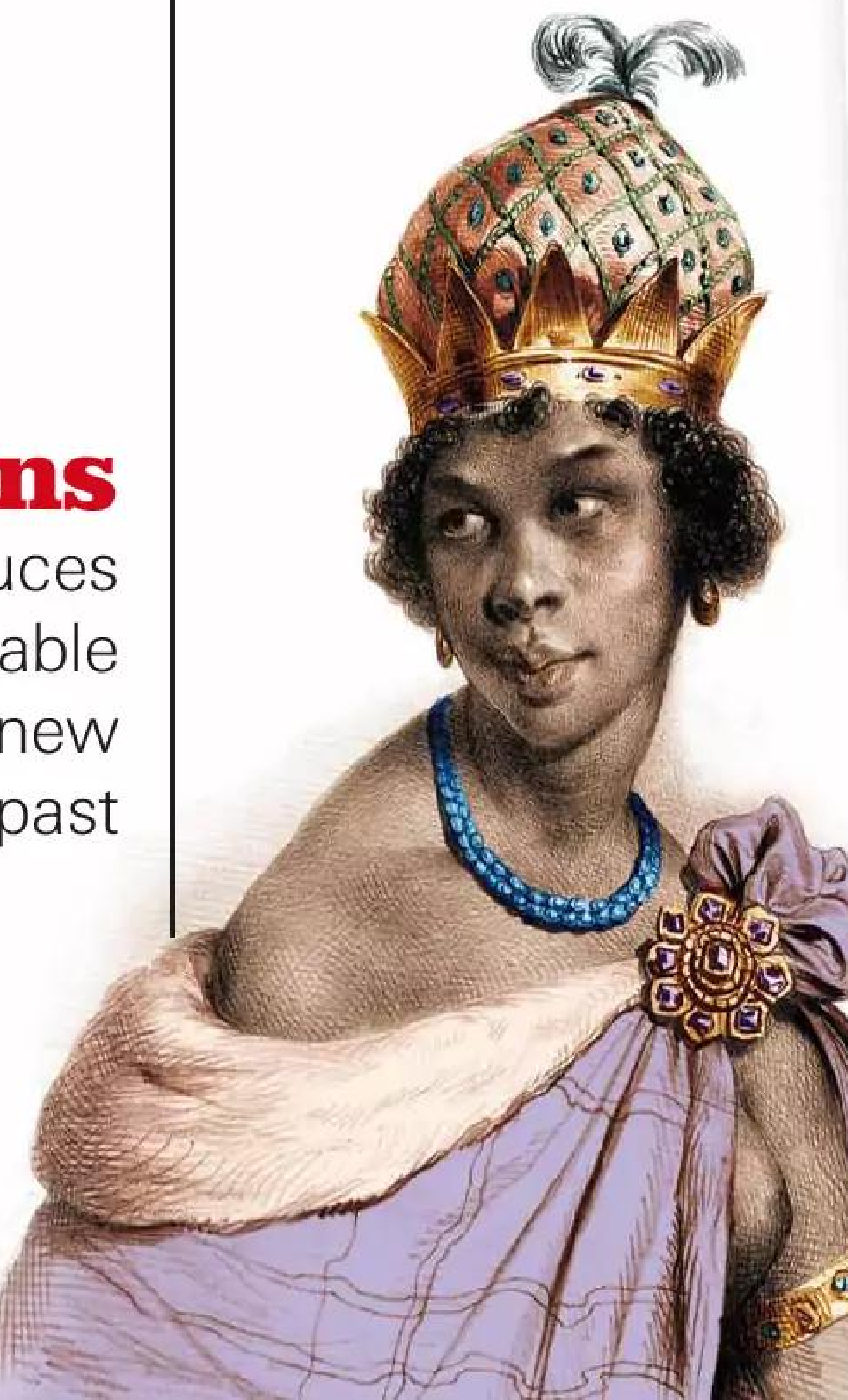


Crimes of the times?

Rosalind Crone on some of the more unusual criminal activities that dogged Victorian Britain

The gardens of the world

Susannah Lyon-Whaley reveals the connections between botany and exploration in early modern Britain



African queens

Paul Akpan introduces a group of remarkable women who offer a new window into Africa's past

Roman rebellion

Guy de la Bédoyère shows how the Spartacus revolt nearly brought ancient Rome to its knees

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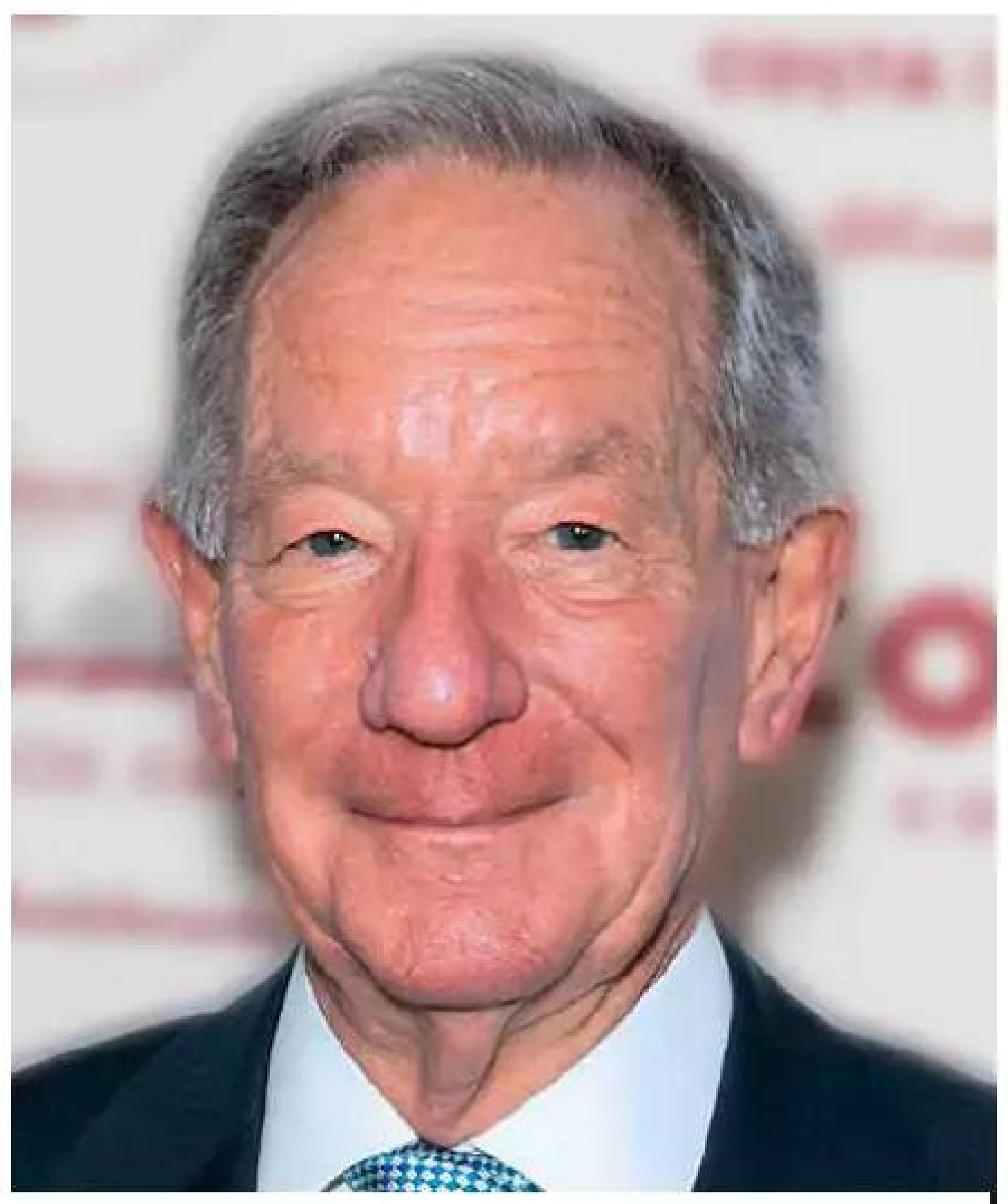
Broadcaster ***Michael Buerk*** *chooses*

Robert FitzRoy

1805–65



Michael Buerk has worked as both a news presenter and a foreign correspondent during his distinguished BBC career. He has hosted BBC Radio 4's *Moral Maze* since 1990. *bbc.co.uk/sounds*

Robert FitzRoy, pictured here in 1860, captained HMS *Beagle*. Michael Buerk sees few parallels between FitzRoy's life and his own

When did you first hear about FitzRoy? Several years ago, while making a programme about Darwin, because as captain of HMS *Beagle*, FitzRoy was integral to the story. He first made a big impression on me because of his prowess as a sailor. I subsequently read a super novel about him, Harry Thompson's *This Thing of Darkness*, which deepened my interest.

What kind of man was he? He was extraordinarily clever and brave, as well as honourable and chivalrous. He was not your common-or-garden aristocrat: if his fourth great-grandmother had been Charles II's wife rather than his mistress, he would have been royalty. He was also a brilliant sailor. He was made captain of the *Beagle* at 23, and was just 26 when he set sail with Darwin. However, he had bipolar disorder and would fall into black moods.

I believe the contradiction – between his literal view of the Bible and the role he played in helping Darwin collect the evidence underpinning *On the Origin of Species* – gnawed away at him and contributed to his depression.

What made him a hero? Here was a man of just 23 who sailed a small ship, the *Beagle*, on landmark voyages, one of which changed our entire perception of human beings' place in nature. I am equally intrigued by the way this committed Christian struggled to accept the scientific evidence in Darwin's book, despite his fine mind.

What was FitzRoy's finest hour? Firstly, sailing the 90ft long *Beagle* – which is what the navy used to call a 'coffin brig', because it had a reputation for being unseaworthy – around Cape Horn. Secondly, founding what became the Meteorological Office. He invented the term 'forecast', and instituted a scientific approach to predicting the weather that saved so many sailors' lives. Yet during FitzRoy's lifetime a lot of boat owners tried to get the office closed down because they didn't want fishermen to have an excuse for staying in port.

Thirdly, I'd highlight his time as governor of New Zealand, where he sought to protect the Maori from unscrupulous settlers who wanted their land. As a result, he was recalled to London.

Is there anything that you don't particularly admire about him? Yes, he had a fairly explosive temper, but nothing else springs to mind.

Can you see any parallels between FitzRoy's life and your own? None whatsoever. I'm not the least bit honourable, I'm extraordinarily sceptical of all religions and I'm a dreadful sailor!

Michael Buerk was talking to York Membery

IN PROFILE

Robert FitzRoy was an officer in the Royal Navy, best known for being the captain of HMS *Beagle* during Darwin's famous voyage. FitzRoy, later promoted to vice-admiral, was also a pioneering meteorologist and in 1854 founded what would later be called the Met Office. He served as governor of New Zealand from 1843–45. The father of five struggled with depression and died by suicide, aged 59.

> " At just 23, FitzRoy sailed a small ship, the *Beagle*, on landmark voyages, one of which changed our entire perception of human beings' place in nature "

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